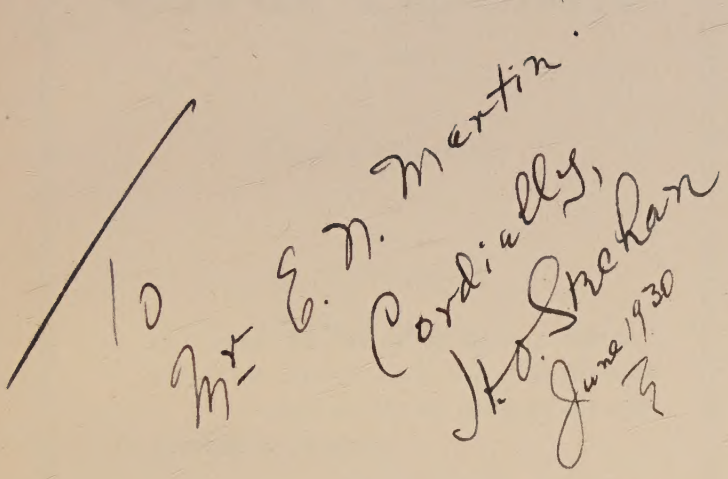
THE GREAT APOSTLE



"IN THE LIFE OF ST. PAUL, WE READ THE LIFE OF MAN. HIS STORY NEVER GROWS OLD AND NEVER LOSES ITS FASCINATION."

—SIR W. M. RAMSAY.

The Great Apostle

(SAINT PAUL)

A PLAY OF THE AGES

BY

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Introduction by

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BISHOP OF KENTUCKY

LOS ANGELES

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THE GREAT APOSTLE
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Introduction

TIME, with all its effacements, is powerless to obliterate the memory of those whose names the world will not permit to die. Among those most deserving of remembrance, few—if any—take precedence of St. Paul. Without detraction or failure to appreciate the great achievements of others, it may be claimed for the heroic Apostle to the Gentiles that his writings and example influence more lives today than any man in all history.

Epochs are made when great men have faith and courage enough to live what they believe, and to die, if need be, for their convictions. Many people contend for their opinions; but few are willing to suffer for a principle.

Silence and compromise never yet have advanced any truth or cause. Silence would have saved the life of St. Paul, or compromise would have spared him innumerable sufferings.

The drama of THE GREAT APOSTLE, which follows, sets forth most clearly and with gripping interest, how heroically this follower of The Master would rather die doing his duty than live and know he had not done it.

In this day of moral bewilderment and spiritual unrest, where many are prospering but not attaining, where so much of what we call progress is merely "horizontal and not vertical," when many men are making a success in life and a failure of life, the career and achievements of St. Paul afford us something definite, stimulating and worthwhile.

If this play by Mr. Stechan be the means of acquainting many with the life of one of the greatest heroes of all time, he will have contributed

something to be appreciated in a day when the drama, in most instances, has failed either to educate or to uplift. So many wish to be amused rather than informed.

THE GREAT APOSTLE may not amuse, as that term is popularly understood; but it will surely inspire.

Perhaps it may also arouse some to stand fearlessly for what they believe. Thousands can talk for one who can act. St. Paul acted; wherefore his life and writings will live so long as time shall last.

CHARLES E. WOODCOCK,

Bishop of Kentucky

Louisville,
1929.

Foreword

"Here was one (Paul) to whom no man that has ever lived, before or since, can furnish a perfect parallel."—Farrar.

ESUS OF NAZARETH'S crucifixion overturned the ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman civilizations, prepared the way for the Christian or modern era, and shifted the center of world-activity from the Orient to the Occident. In this historic upheaval, Paul—the ambassador of Christ—played the principal part; for it was he who bore "The Glad Tidings" which brought about the great change, across the Aegean Sea, from Asia into Europe.

Born in Tarsus about the year 3 A. D., this Hebrew of the Tribe of Benjamin was first called Saul. As a boy he learned the tentmaker's trade. Then going to Jerusalem, he attended the rabbinical college—"at the feet of Gamaliel."

It was during the latter part of Saul's schooling that Jesus conducted His ministry, throughout Palestine. At the time, His Teachings appear to have made no particular impression on the young student. Being "a Pharisee of the Pharisees," Saul naturally became a zealous upholder of the Mosaic law. While there is no evidence that he participated in or was even present at The Master's execution, his subsequent persecution of the Nazarenes warrants the conclusion that Saul fully approved of it.

In recognition of his talents, Saul was admitted to the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews at Jerusalem, as a very young man. Not long afterwards, the Hellenist Stephen, a follower of Jesus, was accused of blasphemy before the Sanhedrin, found guilty, and stoned to death by a Jewish mob. In this first Christian martyrdom, Saul took

part. Oppression followed, in which he harassed the sect mercilessly, dragging men and women and even little children from their homes and throwing them into prison.

With the High Priest's authority to invade Damascus and seize all apostates found there, Saul set out. Grimly rejoicing in what he deemed a most righteous mission, the inquisitor pressed forward until a blinding light broke from Heaven, in the midst of which The Savior appeared to him, in transfigured glory. Conscious of Eternal Truth for the first time, in that sublime moment, Saul the persecutor became Paul "the slave of Jesus Christ;" for, then and there, it was revealed to him that he had been chosen by God to broadcast the Gospel to Jew and Gentile, according to Isaiah, and thereby "give new life to a weary and outworn world."

Facing right about instantly, Paul accepted the divine commission. In all the synagogues and wherever people would listen to him, he testified fearlessly. Remembering him as the recent hounder of Nazarenes, the Sanhedrists were perplexed that he now appeared as their most ardent champion. By reason of the speedy growth of his new influence, the Jews plotted to assassinate Paul, as a traitor to their religion; and he was not without bitter enemies in the Nazarene ranks.

The twelve Apostles, to whose care the infant Church had been intrusted by Jesus, continued to observe the orthodox customs of their ancestors. Their aim was to preserve it as a branch of Judaism, with no thought of separation. Hotly they opposed Paul's program for its larger, independent development. But the Tarsan prevailed. Incontrovertibly, it is historical fact that Christianity, in the world-wide dominion it has achieved, is largely due to Paul's pioneer work—and for it he was ultimately canonized. Not only was he its foremost expounder at the time, but he wrote a series of letters which form the major portion of what we know as *The New Testament*. Truly, in the Christian hierarchy, Paul stands second only to Christ Jesus.

World conquerors have usually been warriors. Yet this first foreign missionary, who blazed the way for the Christian conquest of Western paganism and heathendom was as much a man of peace as The Master Himself. Practically single-handed, he introduced the Gospel into Europe and sowed its seed in countless places, with the result that the Gentile peoples became the custodians and perpetuators of the religious teachings of Jesus, the Jew. Furthermore, Paul was the pioneer internationalist, for he recognized no racial barriers and preached the union of all mankind in one Savior. History holds no more significant moment than when, standing on the shores of the Aegean Sea, twenty centuries ago, Paul decided to cross over to Macedonia; for that marked the beginning of a new world order, whose full promise we have not yet begun to realize, even today.

Of stature small, inexhaustible energy despite "the thorn in the flesh," long suffering and by nothing daunted, the Apostle Paul is one of the very noblest and most characterful men of all time. His gifts and adaptability enabled him to mingle everywhere, among the learned and unlearned, with equal facility. Nothing in antiquity compares with the record of Paul's travels and triumphs. In Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, he contacted high and low. He was the best informed as well as the most cosmopolitan man of his day.

Hence, the life of Paul teems with highly dramatic experiences, singularly interesting to this very day. Nor did it lack in romance, warranting the inference that he was altogether human, as he always insisted. In fact Paul's chief fascination is his intense humanity. His long, varied and eventful career brims over with all the ingredients necessary for a gripping stage-picture of primitive Christianity. And, in the end, as glory's ways so often lead to an ignominious grave, Paul—the world's most spiritual, overcoming man after Christ Jesus—suffered martyrdom in the Rome of Nero, when he had finished the work that he was sent to do, here on earth.

Because of the unflinching manner in which he did it, the brilliance of Paul's example can not be dimmed. There never was a time when the people generally needed the inspiration of such a courageous life more than today. Guided by that thought, it has been put into play-form—the tersest and most direct form of all writing—as the likeliest way for bringing out what the sainted Paul should mean to us.

H. O. STECHAN.

Hollywood,
St. Stephen's Day,
1928

Sources*

HE Acts of the Apostles," in *The New Testament,* contains the only biography we have of Paul; while his fourteen Epistles, preserved in the same work, are largely autobiographical. All other Pauline literature—and it consists of a steadily growing list of unnumbered volumes—is merely a commentary on or an effort to interpret these two fundamental groups of documents.

Hence, they have been followed in the construction of *The Great Apostle,* for the general outline of Paul's career. But so abundant is the dramatic material therein, that only a small part of the canonical record could be used, in making the stage-version for a single evening's performance. Even then, condensation and some rearrangement have been necessary as to minor details. The heraldic figure of THE WISEMAN is introduced to knit the scattered sequences, as the play covers three decades.

The romantic element of *The Great Apostle* has been adapted from "The Acts of Paul and Thekla," one of the apocryphal Church writings of the Second Century. Its authenticity is fairly well established; for half-a-dozen early chroniclers relate much the same story, in one form or another. Having the distinction of being the first Christian romance written adds to its interest.

How Paul came to his mortal end is a complete mystery. That he suffered martyrdom is generally admitted; but there is no credible record telling just how, although various stories have been handed down, purporting to give the details of his execution. At the time, Rome was in such a ferment that, Geike declares, we can never hope to know what really did happen. Renan is of the opinion that Paul met the most violent death imaginable. Coming under Nero, this seems quite probable. The hint for the version which climaxes this play was obtained from an ancient Coptic legend, as related in "The Mythological Acts of the Apostles."

*See Bibliography, Page 147.

Dedication

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not Love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not Love, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not Love, it profiteth me nothing.

Love suffereth long, and is kind; Love envieth not; Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

And now abideth faith, hope, Love, these three: but the greatest of these is Love.

Paul's First Letter
to the Corinthians,
Chapter 13. (R. V.)

Summary of Scenes

TIME: The Thirty Years following the Crucifixion.
PLACE: The ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman worlds.

SCENE I Outside the Walls of Jerusalem.
The Martyrdom of Stephen. A. D. 37.

SCENE II On the Road to Damascus; several months later.
Persecutor Saul becomes Paul the Believer.

SCENE III A home in Iconium.
Thekla rejects her betrothed. A. D. 48.

SCENE IV A cell in Iconium's gaol.
The Apostle and the damsel.

SCENE V The public square in Antioch of Pisidia.
Jupiter's high priest is flouted. A. D. 51.

SCENE VI In the Amphitheatre of Antioch.
Thekla is delivered from the flames.

SCENE VII On the shores of the Aegean Sea.
One of History's sublimest moments. A. D. 52.

SCENE VIII Before Jerusalem's Temple.
Paul's defence to the Jews. A. D. 58.

SCENE IX In the presence of Agrippa.
Paul appeals to Caesar. A. D. 60.

SCENE X A grotto near Seleucia.
Thekla's retreat. A. D. 67.

SCENE XI The Mamertine Prison in Rome, under Nero.
The world's best man meets its worst. A. D. 68.

A WISEMAN. [*Steps before the curtain.*]

Brotherhood of kith and kin, all hail!
Truthfully it has been said:
God performs His wonders in mysterious ways.
And yet, what His profoundest mysteries appear
Are as an open book, to them that learn
To read aright the lives of men,
Dedicated to the service of their fellows.

Such a man it is our vantage to portray,
Here in our mimic world;
One who lived and moved and had his being anciently,
In the mundane still a-churning,
Till the Long Desired of Israel, Whom he had cursed,
Crept into his heart; and then,
Through hate and fear and selfish striving
Burst love and hope and utter selflessness.
Watch how a man of flesh becomes a Man of God!
Watch how he proves the greatest miracle of all!
For in the life of this one man,
You see the life of all mankind unfold.

In olden Tarsus, no mean city, a Pharisee
Named Saul was born, two thousand years ago.
Unto Jerusalem he went, to con the sacred Jewish law,
At the feet of all-wise Gamaliel.
In time he joined the Hebrew court supreme
And set himself to crush out all the Nazarenes.

Our drama of grim, vengeance-breathing Saul,
Begins four years after the Crucifixion.
Intended to blast all faith in Christ,
This misbegotten deed became the very act
Which prospered it. Just how,
Our player-folk shall show you. [*Peeps through curtain.*]
The stage is set. 'Tis nearing sundown.
We are outside the massive walls
Of olden Juda's glorious citadel. [*Disappears.*]

SCENE ONE

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

ABRAHAM
ISAAC
JACOB
ELIAS
} *men of Jerusalem.*

EZRA
JOEL
} *Hebrew zealots.*

AARON, *a Levite captain.*
STEPHEN, *a Hellenist,*
FESTUS, *a Roman officer.*
SAUL, *a member of the Sanhedrin.*
THEKLA, *a damsel of Iconium.*
HELIO, *her aged father.*
MARTHA, *a Nazarene woman.*

Jews, Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Persians,
Ethiopians, Nazarenes and Levites.

SCENE: *A rocky plain before the walls surrounding Jerusalem. There is a narrow opening, back Left, known as the Sheep Gate, from which a slight declivity leads down into the foreground. A roadway comes on from the Right and disappears through the Gate. Tops of the city's buildings are visible above the walls, particularly The Temple. Stubby bits of shrubbery are beginning to leaf out, it being Spring. Otherwise, the general appearance is desolate.*

As the curtain rises, it is late afternoon, nearing sundown. Night falls as the scene progresses. People no longer come out of the city; but over the roadway, from Right, many enter it. The crowd includes shepherds with their stock and travelers from the earth's four corners—Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Persians, Ethiopians and many Jews—giving some idea of ancient Jerusalem's cosmopolitan population.

DISCOVERED: ABRAHAM *and* ISAAC, *middle-aged Jews, who separate from the multitude entering the city. They come forward, engaged in earnest conversation.*

ABRAHAM. You go into yonder City of David?

ISAAC. Aye, for the night.

ABRAHAM. Jehovah's peace attend you.

ISAAC. And you, my brother.

ABRAHAM. Would I were sure of it.

ISAAC. Why not?

ABRAHAM. [*Sighing heavily.*] Because I fear our beloved Israel has fallen upon evil days. Its people scruple not to give ear to all manner of new doctrines. Some are even straying off after false gods.

ISAAC. Be assured, brother, God—our God—cannot perish!

ABRAHAM. [*Shaking head dubiously.*] But deceitful prophets can steal into men's hearts and mislead them; especially when the Sanhedrin becomes so careless as to permit every kind of impostor to roam the land unrestricted, sowing seeds of mischief.

ISAAC. Aye, but the worst malefactor, Him they crucified on Golgotha, four years ago.

ABRAHAM. Notwithstanding, ever since, His teachings have spread and the converts thereto multiplied amazingly. Jerusalem is already in a ferment over the Nazarene heresy.

[*From the city come distant sounds, as of an uprising inside the walls.*]

ISAAC. Be not alarmed, good brother; for, as the learned Gamaliel has said: "If this work be of men, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it."

[*The line of people entering the city has ended. The clamor within grows louder and louder, as if a crowd is drawing near.*]

ABRAHAM. [*Looking toward the city.*] Hear! Even now, there seems to be tumult inside Jerusalem's walls. Who knows what new scourge has been loosed upon the faithful?

[JACOB *and* ELIAS *appear in the Sheep Gate, talking excitedly.*]

ISAAC. [*Seeing them.*] These men shall tell us. [*Calling.*] Ho, ye! What clamor in the Temple City? Have the Romans once more embroiled its sacred peace?

JACOB. [*Approaching.*] Nay, brethren. That outcry is one of mingled indignation and rejoicing.

[*The four meet, downstage.*]

ELIAS. At last, the Sanhedrin has taken heart and found a vile heretic guilty.

ABRAHAM. [*Falling on his knees.*] Praise be to Jehovah, the Most High!

ELIAS. The death sentence was carried by acclamation.

ISAAC. Who may the luckless fellow be?

JACOB. One called Stephen—a Nazarene.

ABRAHAM. Great is the Lord. Let His Name be glorified!

ISAAC. [*Turning away.*] Poor Stephen.

ABRAHAM. [*Confronting* ISAAC.] You know him? [ISAAC *shakes head.*] Perhaps then, you are of his conviction?

ISAAC. [*As the three seem about to pounce upon him.*] Never! I am of Zion. [*They fall back.*] But tell me: how came the Sanhedrin to take notice of this misguided fellow?

ELIAS. Because of blasphemy he uttered against God and Moses.

ISAAC. Yet is he not the only one. In almost every corner of Palestina, preachers may be heard declaring that Jerusalem's

Temple is about to be destroyed and the Laws of Moses abolished.

ABRAHAM. [*Stuffing fingers in his ears.*] Oh, oh—El-Elohe Israel! Stop up my ears against such evil words!

JACOB. Then is it high time someone were made an example of, for such disgraceful speech.

ELIAS. Aye, and a zealous young rabbi, called Saul, proved the blasphemer's undoing.

ISAAC. Saul, the Pharisee?

ABRAHAM. [*As* ELIAS *nods.*] I know him. He comes from Tarsus and was brought up at Rabban Gamaliel's feet.

JACOB. A mighty, young man is this Saul, a glory unto Juda and its hope; for within his bosom burns ardent zeal for the preservation of Moses, David, Solomon, the Law of the Temple, the honor of our priesthood and God's chosen people.

ABRAHAM. [*Fervently.*] More power to the worthy Saul. Israel needs such champions, if it is to remain inviolate as a nation.

ELIAS. [*Piously.*] Verily, my brother, verily!

[*Suddenly a crowd of frenzied Jews bursts through the Sheep Gate. The noise becomes deafening. There is fighting and scrambling, as all seem trying to get out at once. In the mob's midst is* STEPHEN, *surrounded by Temple guards or Levites led by* AARON. *They make half-hearted pretense of protecting him.* STEPHEN *is a handsome, manly young Greek-Jew. Crowned with light curly hair, he has the sweet, sanctified face of an angel. The mob surges around* STEPHEN *who appears to be utterly devoid of fear. He is dragged forward, in spite of the Levites, and subjected to all sorts of indignities—spit at, cuffed, beaten and his clothes torn.*]

VOICES. [*Members of mob jeering and taunting* STEPHEN.]

Impostor! Malefactor! Blasphemer! Nazarene! Renegade! Another Jesus!

[*Each epithet is followed by derisive hoots, ribald gestures, and frenzied laughter, as the angered Jews gnash their teeth at* STEPHEN, *who bears all meekly.*]

EZRA. [*Charging at* STEPHEN.] Stone him!

VOICES. Aye, aye—stone him!

AARON. Not so fast, oh men of Jerusalem!

VOICES. The law—the law!

EZRA. By the everlasting Temple walls is he guilty—an apostate heretic, the blasphemous enemy of God.

VOICES. [*Of the surging mob.*] Yea—guilty! Guilty!

EZRA. Having sworn to the charge before the Sanhedrin, mine is the privilege to cast the first stone at him.

JOEL. [*Crowding forward.*] And mine too, for I also bore witness to his sacrilege.

AARON. So you shall—both of you!

EZRA. Then why delay?

[*As the mob becomes increasingly restive, other sounds are heard from inside the city walls. This time it is a measured tread to bugle notes. The mob is too intent upon its vengeance to take notice.*]

AARON. As the Law saith: "The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hands of all the people. So shall ye put the evil away from among you."

JOEL. [*Seizing a stone.*] Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.

VOICES. [*Howling.*] Vengeance—vengeance!

AARON. [*To* STEPHEN.] This is your last moment, wretch. Recant! What say you?

STEPHEN. What the Lord Jesus said: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake—for so persecuted they the prophets before you."

[*As* STEPHEN *speaks, the mob fairly bellows; but his voice rings out clearly over all.*]

EZRA. [*Hissing at* STEPHEN.] Profane, obstinate dog!

AARON. To the stones, then!

[*A detachment of Roman soldiers comes through the Sheep Gate, on a trot, as* EZRA *and* JOEL *are about to stone* STEPHEN. *Led by* FESTUS, *the military makes straight for the pack, which gives way sullenly.*]

FESTUS. Why this uproar?

VOICES. Stone him!

FESTUS. [*Mistaking demand.*] More sedition, eh?

EZRA. [*Dodging wildly, in and out among the mob, calls frantically.*] Saul, Saul—Rabbi Saul!

FESTUS. [*Bristling angrily.*] As I thought. You contemplate violence against Imperial Rome—rabble of Jerusalem that you are. Then scatter—ere our blades bathe in your slavish blood!

[*The Romans are on the point of dispersing the mob, when* SAUL *comes into the foreground, from its midst. He is a proud young Pharisee, of pious, cultured appearance, clad in Sanhedrin garb of richest fabrics. He wears a turban, and fastened between his eyes is an amulet called "phylactery." Though short of stature, in moments of stress or exaltation,* SAUL *seems to grow large in the eyes of all who behold him. With arrogant self-assurance, he approaches* FESTUS. *As he does, the mob falls back respectfully.*]

SAUL. Your pardon, son of Rome! It is my privilege to inform you we are not here to affront the noble Caesar.

FESTUS. What mean you then?

SAUL. Merely a fulfillment of our Law.

FESTUS. How law, in such a lawless gathering?

SAUL. No lawlessness this, most worthy Festus, but rather the putting down thereof.

FESTUS. And who are you, to give me such assurance?

SAUL. [*Drawing himself up.*] I am Saul, a priest of God and member of the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the Jews, whose edicts even Caesar honors. Here, see—[*He hands a parchment to* FESTUS.]—is authority from that august tribunal to execute this Hellenist Stephen, for having uttered seditious doctrine in our synagogues. Wherefore, our loyalty to Rome demands that he be put to death. Having found him guilty, that is why we are here, noble Festus.

VOICES. [*From out the mob, once more growing impatient.*] Stone him—aye, aye—stone him!

FESTUS. [*Having scanned parchment, returns it to* SAUL.] Very well, then. Go about your business, but with less uproar! It sounded in Antonia's Tower as if all Jerusalem had broken loose.

SAUL. Never that.

FESTUS. Hold your people in check, Rabbi Saul, lest they become unruly—and subject to our swords.

SAUL. [*Bows patronizingly.*] As you command, most worthy Roman.

[FESTUS *signals his soldiers to retire. They disappear through the Sheep Gate.* SAUL, EZRA, AARON *and* JOEL *put their heads together, in council.* STEPHEN *being alone, down Left, is approached by* MARTHA *and other Nazarene women,*

who have entered unobserved, in the growing darkness. They attempt to console him.]

STEPHEN. [*To the women.*] Send word to Thekla, in Iconium. Tell her I faced death joyfully!

MARTHA. Is there nothing else that we can do for you, Brother Stephen?

STEPHEN. [*As women weep softly.*] Nothing! Only be of good cheer, my sisters, and weep not for me! The way to Jesus is short. He hath overcome the world for all of us. Even now, I see Him awaiting me, with outstretched arms. I go on before. So, be ye faithful. Be ye obedient; and be ye strong. Then we shall all meet again, in the new Jerusalem, where there is no separation.

AARON. [*Turning, sees women.*] Away, wenches! [*Women shrink into the dusk, as the mob hoots and rages.*] This time, the Law's demands shall not be thwarted. Ho, ye witnesses—Ezra and Joel!

[EZRA *and* JOEL *approach. Stripping off their outer garments, they cast them aside.*]

ISAAC. [*Intoning.*] Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed!

ABRAHAM. [*Snarling at* ISAAC.] Better guard thy tongue, brother—in this assembly!

ISAAC. I was merely quoting Holy Writ.

SAUL. [*To* EZRA *and* JOEL *as they take up stones.*] God's blessing on you faithful men, for testifying in His Name!

AARON. Ready? Heave at him!

EZRA. [*Casting the first stone.*] Blasphemer!

[STEPHEN *staggers as it strikes him. The mob appears to go mad. Four giant Ethiopians enter, Right, with a carrying-chair. Their way being barred, they set down the chair,*

which is occupied by HELIO, *an elderly Greek, and* THEKLA, *his radiant, sixteen-year-old daughter.*]

THEKLA. [*Leaping from the chair.*] Look, father—see! [*Getting in* JOEL'S *way, she prevents his hurling the stone he has uplifted.*] For shame!

STEPHEN. Thekla, you—

[*The mob halts its bloody work as* STEPHEN *and* THEKLA *meet.*]

THEKLA. Stephen! [*Turning.*] Father, father—

SAUL. [*Dashing forward.*] Out of the way, woman!

THEKLA. [*As* HELIO *approaches.*] It is Stephen, father—my own dear Stephen. [*She embraces him.*]

SAUL. [*Separating them.*] This is God's business.

THEKLA. To be stoned?

STEPHEN. [*Gently.*] Aye, beloved Thekla, even as it was our precious Lord Jesus' to be crucified.

THEKLA. [*Chokingly.*] Dearest Stephen, I always knew you would come to no good end, when you took up this wild cause.

HELIO. [*To* SAUL, *indicating* STEPHEN.] Be merciful! The lad is not right.

SAUL. [*To* THEKLA.] Then you are not of his conversion, though seeming to be tenderly affectioned for him.

HELIO. Great Zeus forbid! We are Greeks.

THEKLA. Stephen, Stephen—

SAUL. [*Pushing her aside.*] Out of the way!

STEPHEN. Do with me as you like, oh Saul; but please to treat her gently.

SAUL. God's everlasting curse upon you, pig!

[*As* SAUL *strikes at* STEPHEN, *the mob becomes restive.*]

STEPHEN. [*Showing no resentment.*] Not so did Jesus, your own God's new executor, Saul, present the divine law of love which blesses even those who outrage it.

EZRA. [*Frothing with anger.*] Is there no way to silence this demon?

HELIO. [*Taking* THEKLA'S *hand*] Come away, my child.

THEKLA. [*Holding back.*] Away from Stephen, in his distress? That is why we came to Jerusalem—to help him, did we not?

SAUL. You are too late.

THEKLA. [*At* SAUL'S *feet.*] Great Rabbi, my maiden heart cries out to you for mercy.

SAUL. For such as he—[*Indicating* STEPHEN.]—there can be no mercy short of death.

STEPHEN. Go, Thekla, and pray that He will come to you, as now I follow Him. Already, I can feel His footprints underneath my feet; for over this self-same path the beloved Savior bore His cross to Calvary, four short years ago. [*His face glows triumphantly.*]

ABRAHAM. [*Crowding forward, smites* STEPHEN *on the mouth.*] Infamous one!

THEKLA. [*Wincing.*] Oh-h-h-h!

HELIO. [*Alarmed as the mob's ugly spirit grows.*] Come, daughter, this is no place for us.

THEKLA. [*Kneeling.*] Let me die with Stephen!

SAUL. Remain longer—and that you shall.

[*Assisted by his Ethiopians,* HELIO *forces* THEKLA *into the chair.*]

THEKLA. [*Flashing anger, over her shoulder.*] Beware, Saul! I damn you. For this deed, you shall never again know peace. The maiden robbed of her lover calls down upon your evil head—a perpetual curse.

SAUL. [*Sneeringly.*] Is that all? [*Turns on his heel.*]

THEKLA. And be careful how we should ever meet again, Saul—beware!

STEPHEN. Thekla, dearest Thekla, be not overcome of evil; but try to overcome evil with good!

[*Ethiopians disappear through the Sheep Gate with the chair, at* HELIO'S *signal. Above the mob's tumult,* THEKLA'S *heart-broken cries for* STEPHEN *are heard.*]

VOICES. [*Of the mob, closing in on* STEPHEN.] Down with the renegade—death!

AARON. Quick, now—to the stones!

STEPHEN. [*Kneeling in prayer.*] Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done—

[*Missiles rain upon* STEPHEN, *accompanied by a storm of abuse and execration.*]

ELIAS. Death to you—God defier!

STEPHEN. [*With hands uplifted.*] Lord Jesus, receive Thou my spirit!

NAZARENE WOMEN. [*Wailing, in the background.*] Hosannah in the highest!

ISAAC. [*Warningly, as* SAUL *picks up a stone.*] Who sends a missile skyward should not be surprised if it falls on his own head.

SAUL. [*Darting a sinister look at* ISAAC.] Another sort of prophet, eh? Well, take care, brother, lest the Sanhedrin summon you—like him!

[*Indicating* STEPHEN, SAUL *drops the stone, crosses Left and pauses beside the clothes of the witnesses. With evident satisfaction, he views the attack, as the mob closes in savagely on its victim.*]

MARTHA. Father, forgive them—for they know not what they do.

SAUL. [*Exultingly.*] Thus perish all blasphemers.

STEPHEN. Dear Lord, lay not this sin to their charge! [*After another volley of stones, he topples over.*]

JOEL. [*Hissing.*] Ha! He's done for.

AARON. [*Bending over* STEPHEN, *as the mob yells madly.*] Dead—he's dead! The Sanhedrin's judgment is fulfilled. [*Turning.*] Rabbi Saul, the heretic is dead.

[*Hearing this, the mob becomes frantic and chants*: Dead, dead—he's dead. The defier of God is dead.]

SAUL. [*Addressing the mob.*] Then disperse, ye—back into the city. God's will has been done. This day's good work is long to be remembered.

[*It is dark now. The full moon rises over Jerusalem's walls. Under* SAUL'S *leadership, the Jews retire into the city, singing. When all have gone, a group of gray-garbed Nazarene men and women appear from the Right, approach the body of* STEPHEN *and wrap it tenderly in a winding-sheet.*]

MARTHA. Peace on earth, good will toward all mankind.

[*Picking up the body, the Nazarenes carry it off, Right, chanting as they go*:]

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil—"

[*As the chant gradually fades out, the curtain falls slowly.*]

END OF SCENE ONE

CURTAIN

THE WISEMAN. [*Before the curtain.*]

Like a wild beast tasting blood,
Zealot Saul charged through Jerusalem,
Ravaging the abhorred young Church
And pillaging all those of The Way.
Before his rage unnumbered thousands fell.
Months later, still threatening slaughter,
He obtained letters from the High Priest,
Damascus-ward his man-hunt to pursue.

And again the wonder happened.
Yet, no wonder really was it;
For God knows how to make men pause,
When they plunge madly on ahead.

The Damascan Road is but the road of life,
Which each one travels in his time, like Saul.
Yet with this difference: our ears are dull.
We fail to hear the Voice of Warning,
Not to kick against the goads.
Hardest it is to open men's eyes
To the Allness of things spiritual.

But Saul, the persecutor, heard and,
Then and there, turned Champion Paul,
When, with blinded eyes, he saw the Truth Sublime.
Believing needs a stout heart;
For Faith is a rare courage,
Rather than merely wanting to believe.

Now are we in the Syrian desert, by a wayside pool.
'Tis midday and high burns the white-hot sun.
Shimmering afar lies renowned Damascus,
Pearl of all the opulent East.

SCENE TWO

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

AGABUS, *a Galilean.*
JAMES, *of Capernaum.*
EZRA.
JOEL.
AARON.
SAUL.
FESTUS.
VOICE OF THE CHRIST.

Levites, Roman soldiers, Etc.

SCENE: *A wayside pool, in the Syrian desert, surrounded by tall palms. Faintly visible in the distance are the outlines of Damascus. This oasis stands in a glistering, sandy waste. As it is approaching high-noon, the summer sun burns fiercely overhead, a blaze of blinding light. The cloudless sky glows like molten brass; while the desert sands glare as liquid iron in a furnace. The atmosphere seems all a-quiver.*

DISCOVERED: AGABUS *and* JAMES, *two simple Nazarenes, in the act of folding up their tent and continuing the journey into Damascus.*

AGABUS. [*With heavy sigh.*] Alas how true, that woman-born man is of few days and full of trouble. [*Sits down again.*]

JAMES. [*Cheerfully.*] Come, come!

AGABUS. But how much farther, oh Lord?

JAMES. Until safe refuge is found.

AGABUS. [*Mournfully.*] Will that ever be?

JAMES. When wavering in the Faith, good Brother Agabus, think on Calvary! [*Embraces him.*]

AGABUS. Aye, and for so thinking, we have been driven from

every place becoming dear—Galilee, Samaria, Nazareth. Not wavering, James, I'm tired.

JAMES. Pluck up, we must hasten into Damascus, to warn the brethren of the dreaded devastator's approach.

AGABUS. Surely, God, our God—the only God that is—will one day overtake cruel Saul.

JAMES. That He will, brother. [*Having crossed Left, pauses for* AGABUS *to join him.*]

AGABUS. Wherefore we may as well tarry here—at least until high-noon's scorching sun declines somewhat.

JAMES. [*A bit impatient.*] Nay, nay! Who knows what moment the relentless persecutor may pass this way? Then will the gentle Damascan saints be at his savage mercy.

AGABUS. If it be God's will that they should suffer, Brother James, you cannot prevent it.

JAMES. God knows naught of suffering, Agabus. It is entirely of man. So rejoice, for even now, He may be driving Saul remorselessly along his blood-stained course—and for a very definite purpose.

AGABUS. That more may die like Stephen, I suppose.

JAMES. He is not dead.

AGABUS. Stephen—not dead?

JAMES. No! Because, for him who understands God's Truth, there is no death. Our Brother Stephen has merely been translated into that more blessed life which is eternal.

AGABUS. Yet has the vengeance-breathing Saul made havoc of our kind. Like a wild boar uprooting a vineyard he has charged through Jerusalem, Bethany and Jericho, everywhere ravaging the harmless followers of the Meek and Lowly One.

[*A cavalcade is heard approaching, off Right.*]

JAMES. Listen!

AGABUS. [*Wearily.*] How long, oh Lord—how much longer?

JAMES. [*Snatching up impedimenta.*] Haste, brother! Someone approaches. It may be Saul.

AGABUS. Much rather would I tarry. [*Drags himself off, Left, reluctantly, after* JAMES.]

LOUD VOICES. [*Of drivers, off stage, calling to their animals.*] Ho—hey—he—there!

[*A number of asses with loads and attendants, enter Right, followed by Levites with* AARON *at their head,* EZRA *and* JOEL.]

AARON. Thanks to Jehovah that He has brought us to this goodly shade, for a noontide rest.

EZRA. Rest—is that all you ever think of? [*Disappears, off Left.*]

JOEL. For man and beast, here are water and refreshment.

[SAUL *and* FESTUS *ride on, from Right, followed by their respective retinues.* SAUL *appears haughtier and more than ever the self-righteous Pharisee. Both dismount, deeply engrossed in conversation.*]

FESTUS. I too go to Damascus, Rabbi, in token of Caesar's pleasure for his bidding well done by me, back yonder.

SAUL. And I go as a testimony of God's pleasure, to pursue His work—ahead.

FESTUS. Still hunting Nazarenes?

SAUL. [*Malignantly.*] Until the last one has recanted, down to the smallest, snivelling, apostate brat among them. As the Sanhedrin's legate, I am armed with unlimited authority for the suppression of all heresy.

FESTUS. But they seem unoffending—non-resistant. Wherefore, I have never been able to understand why you, oh Saul, should track them so relentlessly.

[*Attendants lead animals off, Left; while others seek comfort in the shade.*]

SAUL. That they may be stamped out. All heretics must be destroyed as so much vermin. A hateful, mischief-making crew, these Nazarenes—opposed to everything we God-fearing Jews hold high and holy.

FESTUS. Yet are they peaceable; and I am told that their leader, the man called Jesus, never lifted a hand against anyone.

SAUL. [*With supreme contempt.*] Jesus, huh! No man, He, but a milk-sop—long on talk and perversions of the law. I wish God had let me confront Him, before they nailed Him on the accursed tree.

FESTUS. But many of your own good Jewish people have become His followers. Some even call Him King and Redeemer—

SAUL. [*Interrupting.*] Stop, stop, oh Festus! Although a Roman, blaspheme not! No truly good Jews ever esteemed the vile fellow; only those weak-kneed in the faith of their fathers, whom the impostor was able easily to deceive. King, you say? Who ever heard of a king that would not fight for his kingdom? And redeemer, too? [*Forces sneering laugh.*] We never seem to run short of self-appointed redeemers in Israel. In my time, I have known a dozen of them myself. But speaking seriously, noble Festus, all I have to say concerning that claim of the infamous Nazarene—had He really been Messias, neither you nor any of your Roman cohorts would be in our Holy Land today.

FESTUS. [*With amused surprise.*] What?

SAUL. Zion's deliverer, promised of God through the ages

and by all the prophets, never could have been crucified as an ordinary malefactor. Think you after seeking Him these many generations and making our whole religious life turn upon His expected advent, Israel would have been found sleeping when its long-looked-for redeemer, the Anointed Son of Almighty God, should finally come?

FESTUS. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] I know not.

SAUL. [*Greatly agitated.*] No, no, a thousand thousand times—NO! And note this well most worthy Festus: when Messias does come unto us, the chosen people, which He must ere long—for Israel's God never yet failed in a promise to his own—it will be to deliver us from all tyranny, with a flaming sword, to slay, destroy and subjugate all who hold us in bondage—

FESTUS. [*Trying to stop him.*] Saul, Saul—

SAUL. [*Going right on.*] Even the vaunted might of your own Imperial Rome, oh Festus, He will shatter like a potsherd.

FESTUS. The noonday heat affects you, Saul.

SAUL. Your Caesar can rejoice that this felon-Nazarene was not Messias. What is more: Roman security in these parts depends on my running down the renegade's followers. Whoever heard of any good coming out of Nazareth? Hence must the charlatan's adherents perish.

FESTUS. You make too much of these few people, Rabbi.

SAUL. Few? Why, the land is overrun with them. When the heretic Stephen fell before the stones, three months agone—you remember the time?

FESTUS. Indeed I do.

SAUL. We of the Sanhedrin believed that ghastly example would terrify the rest. But the very act seems to have bred the pest in ever-increasing numbers.

FESTUS. Perhaps they thrive on persecution.

[JOEL *approaches* SAUL, *to speak to him, but is waved off.*]

SAUL. Mine own self have seen a thousand offered up since then, and added thousands tortured and imprisoned. My aides have entered countless homes, seized men, women and children, and penned them up. God's be the glory that Jerusalem and every nook and corner, between here and there, have been thoroughly ridded of the pestilence.

FESTUS. What of Damascus?

SAUL. I have report of a loathsome nest remaining there. But they shall be hunted out, every last one of them, and taken to Jerusalem in chains. If, as you say, oh Festus, they seem to thrive on persecution, I will make a speedy end of both the cause and the effect, by wiping them out completely. Too long have we temporized and played with fire. When next I present myself in the Temple for God's approval, He shall have reason to say: "Well done, Saul, thou good and faithful servant"—for there will be no more Nazarenes left in Israel.

[EZRA *runs on, Left.*]

EZRA. [*Greatly excited.*] Rabbi Saul, just ahead are two of the hated ones.

SAUL. Overtake them! We follow instantly.

[EZRA *hastens out, as he came.*]

FESTUS. Let us pause here, in this shade, while the noonday heat passes over.

SAUL. Not Saul, the agent of the Lord, lest some of His enemies escape. [*Giving order to an attendant.*] Harness the animals!

FESTUS. I refuse to torture my beast. Hence, we will refresh ourselves, yonder. [*Goes Right.*]

SAUL. [*Ignoring* FESTUS, *to his men.*] More speed! Already have we lost too many precious moments.

FESTUS. May fortune reward your impassioned haste, oh Saul. [*He passes off, Right, followed by his men.*]

AARON. [*To* SAUL, *as an attendant brings his ass.*] Here, Master.

SAUL. Under way—quickly!

VOICES. [*Of animal drivers.*] Ho—he—hey!

[SAUL *makes a frantic effort to get his men started. As he is on the point of mounting, a terrific noise resounds, like a deafening thunderclap. A blinding light flashes from Heaven. The whole atmosphere seems to have caught fire, for the phenomenon out-dazzles the noonday Syrian sun. The terrorized animals stampede off, in all directions; while* SAUL'S *men are struck down, in their tracks. An ominous silence follows. Only* SAUL *dares to look up. His startled and dumbfounded gaze beholds a vision of* THE CHRIST *in transfigured glory. Though not recognizing Him at once,* SAUL *realizes he is face to face with something of greatest moment.*]

VOICE OF THE CHRIST. Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.

SAUL. [*Bewildered.*] Who art Thou, Lord?

VOICE OF THE CHRIST. I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

SAUL. [*In abject humility.*] Thou art He?

VOICE OF THE CHRIST. Verily. Arise, Saul! Stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee in order to make thee a minister and a witness, both as to these things which thou hast already seen and of those things in the which I will yet appear unto thee.

SAUL. [*Staggers to his feet.*] Have mercy, my Lord God!

VOICE OF THE CHRIST. I will deliver thee from the Jews and

from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light, and from obedience to Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among those who are sanctified through faith in Me.

SAUL. [*Gropingly.*] What shall I do, Lord?

VOICE OF THE CHRIST. Continue on into Damascus! There shalt thou be told of all the things which are appointed for thee to do.

[*Slowly the vision of* THE CHRIST *fades from view.*]

SAUL. [*With hands uplifted.*] Blessed be the Name of the Lord, from this time forevermore! [*Dropping to his knees, in prayer.*] Thy will be done, oh God—not mine.

[*The wind soughs gently through the palms; the light becomes as it was before.* SAUL'S *attendants arise, one after the other, all a-tremble. Befuddled, they rub their eyes; none saw or heard what* SAUL *did. Yet they are aware something most unusual has happened.* SAUL *totters helplessly—blind.*]

JOEL. [*Approaching him.*] What was that, Rabbi Saul?

SAUL. What was what?

JOEL. The thunder and lightning, just now?

SAUL. You saw then and heard, too?

AARON. Aye, Master, but could not understand. It seemed like the voice of an angel.

SAUL. I know, I know. [*His former haughtiness gone.*] Give me your hand, Joel! [*All are horrified when they realize he has been stricken.*]

JOEL. [*Taking his hand.*] What is it, Master?

SAUL. All seems dark.

AARON. Surely, Saul, you are not blind?

SAUL. [*Nodding resignedly.*] Aye, and justly so.

JOEL. God have mercy—

SAUL. [*Breaking in.*] Quick, lead me into Damascus, where I shall learn His plans—for me!

AARON. And there we'll make short shrift of the remaining Nazarenes.

SAUL. Not now, brother! I have become a slave of their own Jesus, Israel's Long Desired—the one true Christ and Son of God. [*Others do not know what to make of this.*]

JOEL. Master, Master—what are you saying?

EZRA. [*Enters Left, followed by Levites dragging* JAMES *and* AGABUS.] Here are the apostate rats, Rabbi Saul!

SAUL. [*Meekly.*] God bless the brethren.

EZRA. [*Observing* SAUL'S *blindness.*] Why, Master, what ails you?

JOEL. [*In low tone, to* EZRA.] He's—blind.

SAUL. Where are the gentle disciples? [*Fumbling about, grasps* JAMES' *hand and kisses it.*] Beloved brother!

AGABUS. [*Bewildered.*] W-w-what—Saul, the persecutor?

SAUL. Saul, the persecutor, that was; but henceforth, an humble bondman of Jesus Christ.

JAMES. Wonder of wonders!

AGABUS. Said I not God would overtake him? [*Sinks to his knees reverently.*]

EZRA. [*With growing anger.*] What's the meaning of all this, Rabbi Saul?

SAUL. It means, most righteous Ezra, that like these— [*In-*

dicating JAMES *and* AGABUS.]—I am become a contemptible Nazarene.

EZRA. You, the Sanhedrin's legate—a Nazarene? [*On the point of springing at* SAUL, *but* JOEL *prevents him.*]

JOEL. [*Half aside.*] The noonday sun has turned his head.

SAUL. [*Overhearing.*] On the contrary, good Joel, God has touched my heart. Hitherto, though open-eyed, I walked in darkness, even as you and Ezra and the rest of our people. But this day I have seen the light of the Eternal Father's glory, made radiantly manifest in the face of Jesus Christ.

AGABUS. You saw Him?

[SAUL *nods deliberately.*]

EZRA. Monstrous sacrilege! The heresy hunter turned heretic.

JOEL. [*As an attendant leads on several animals from Right.*] Here is your ass, Rabbi. Get on that we may continue into Damascus.

SAUL. [*Waving* JOEL *aside.*] I shall go on foot, even as the lowliest follower of my new Master—the despised and rejected Man of many sorrows.

EZRA. [*Shaking fist angrily.*] Woe to you, Saul! The Sanhedrin shall hear of your perfidy. Come, Joel, back to Jerusalem, and you who can still keep faith with Israel's God. As for those who will not—anathema!

[*Gnashing his teeth in rage,* EZRA *dashes out, Right, followed by others of his retinue with their animals.* SAUL *stands alone, Center, seemingly limp and broken.* AGABUS *and* JAMES, *Left.*]

JOEL. [*Pausing, turns to* SAUL *with a look of entreaty.*] Come, Rabbi—[*Receiving no reply, he passes off, Right, greatly distressed.*]

AGABUS. [*To* JAMES, *with air of bewilderment.*] What now?

JAMES. In the name of the Lord, Who heals all wounds, where would you go, Saul?

SAUL. [*Seeming utterly helpless.*] Support me, good brethren, and lead me unto the saints of Damascus, as Christ Jesus directed.

[*Stepping on either side of him,* JAMES *and* AGABUS *take* SAUL'S *arms and lead him off, Left.*]

END OF SCENE TWO

CURTAIN

THE WISEMAN. [*Before the curtain.*]

After Damascus followed stormy days
And trying years for Paul, a Nazarene now.
Like Jesus, he withdrew into the desert.
One cannot hear the soul in seething cities,
Communing best with God in silences afar.

When Paul came forth, his one desire was
To share the new-found Truth with all men.
Straight to the synagogues he hied,
That formerly had welcomed him.
But no more! Now an apostate,
Pious Jews would kill him as a traitor;
While even more suspicious were they of The Way,
For Paul to them was Saul—unchanged.
A scourge eleven years before,
They still doubted his good faith.

Meanwhile, he lived precariously,
As much so as his former victims had.
And yet, Paul's ardor for the precious Word
Cooled not, despite the sufferings it entailed.
His eyes unsealed, nothing could deflect him
From the resolve to serve The Christ.
For Jerusalem's needy, he gathered alms,
Which the Jews accepted—but his words refused.
Everywhere their fury he must flee.

Wandering long through Syria and Cilicia,
Paul came at last unto Iconium,
Where Thekla lived, the damsel Stephen loved.
Now you shall see her in her home,
As in our play a new and poignant strain begins.

SCENE THREE

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

THEKLA.
DORCAS, *her maid-servant.*
PAUL, *formerly called Saul.*
THEOCLEIA, *Thekla's mother.*
THAMYRIS, *a young Iconian noble.*
DEMAS, HERMOGENES } *Jewish conspirators.*

SCENE: *An upper chamber in the house of* THEOCLEIA, *in Iconium. It is a low room, with vaulted ceiling. A door, Right, gives entrance from below; another door, Left, opens into an adjoining room. Through the large, open window, Back Center, the flat, white buildings and housetops beyond are visible.*

Scattered about the room is a profusion of cushions, rugs and furnishings, which suggest that their owner possesses both wealth and position. Yet, a touch of simple elegance rests over all.

The curtain's rise reveals THEKLA *seated by the window, gazing out, in a far-away manner. Eleven years having elapsed since she was last seen,* THEKLA *is now a mature young woman. Strains of a Nazarene hymn—"The Ninety-first Psalm"—chanted off-stage, by singers presumably in a neighboring house, float up and seem to fill* THEKLA *with strange delight. It being late afternoon, darkness comes on as the scene advances.*

THEKLA. [*As the singing ends.*] Chant on, oh strange, unknown singers, those sweetly haunting strains! They help to keep me faithful to the memory of dear Stephen.

[*As* THEKLA *leans out of the casement, to see the singers, her maid,* DORCAS, *enters Right.*]

DORCAS. Still sitting there? [*Approaching nearer.*] Your mother asks to see you, Thekla.

THEKLA. [*Absent-mindedly*] My mother? Why, yes! Almost had I forgotten her.

DORCAS. And him she's chosen for you to wed.

THEKLA. Who—Thamyris? [DORCAS *nods.*] Oh Dorcas, tell me: is that all women are intended for—to wed and breed?

DORCAS. It seems so. But surely, you are most fortunate—

THEKLA. [*Arising, interrupts.*] Have you learned the name of yonder preacher?

DORCAS. They call him—Paul.

THEKLA. Paul? [*Her countenance darkens.*] How strangely like the name of Saul it is.

DORCAS. I thought of that too.

THEKLA. Merely a coincidence! [*Brightening.*] But this man Paul, I'll wager he is full of grace—like Stephen.

DORCAS. You're wrong, mistress. One more unattractive, I have never seen.

THEKLA. [*Startling.*] What's that?

DORCAS. He is runty, lean and gnarled.

[*From time to time now, an unseen preacher,* PAUL, *as he who was* SAUL *is henceforth known, can be heard, exhorting his flock, in a nearby house.*]

PAUL. [*Off stage.*] Friends and believers—

THEKLA. [*Running to the window.*] Listen, Dorcas!

PAUL. [*Off stage.*]—"this is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom

Thou has sent," as our good Brother John has reported. This *is* life eternal, oh saints of Iconium, not shall be; for now is the accepted time—behold, now is the day of our salvation.

DORCAS. Come to your mother, Thekla! [*Tries to lead her away from the window.*]

THEKLA. Not now. The voice of Paul, at last, for which I have been waiting, all day long. If you would hear that which alone is worth while, Dorcas, give ear! [*She leans far out through the casement, to catch every word.*]

PAUL. [*Off stage.*] "I am the resurrection and the life," our dear Lord Jesus said. "And he that believeth on Me, though he were dead—yet shall he live."

THEKLA. Master, Master, save me from this living death. I do believe.

DORCAS. [*Greatly alarmed.*] What are you saying, Thekla?

PAUL. [*Off stage.*] Wherefore, walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Come unto me all ye that thirst for the living water and I will give you drink. [*Sounds of great jubilation, off stage.*]

THEKLA. I come, Paul—in Stephen's memory, I come.

[THEKLA *crosses, Right, as if to dash out. At the door she is met by her mother,* THEOCLEIA, *just entering, a stately, middle-aged matron.*]

THEOCLEIA. You were coming to me, at last?

THEKLA. No, mother. I was going to find him.

THEOCLEIA. Thamyris?

THEKLA. Yonder rabbi. [*Struggles to free herself, as* THEOCLEIA *detains her.*] Let me go!

THEOCLEIA. You, the daughter of a noble Greek family, would consort with Jews?

THEKLA. Not consort, mother—only worship with them.

THEOCLEIA. Since when do maidens seek out men, unknown to them? [*Softening.*] Come, Thekla dear, forget this foolishness. For days now, you have neglected your home, your kindred, and even him who is to be your husband.

THEKLA. That long? It seems but yesterday I first heard the glad tidings preached in our good neighbor's house. [*Taking a step toward the window.*] Listen, mother.

THEOCLEIA. [*Checking her.*] No straining after strange gods for me. Great Zeus suffices all my needs.

THEKLA. [*As* PAUL *begins again.*] There, mother!

PAUL. [*Off stage.*] Blessed are they that keep the flesh undefiled, for they shall be the temple of God.

THEKLA. [*Ecstatically.*] Do you hear?

PAUL. [*Off stage.*] Blessed are the chaste, for God will reveal Himself unto them. Blessed are the bodies and souls of virgins—

THEKLA. You hear that, mother? [*Runs to the window and leans out.*]

PAUL. [*Off stage.*]—for they shall be pleasing unto God, and shall not lose the reward of their chastity; for the word of their Heavenly Father shall prove effectual to their salvation and they shall enjoy rest forevermore.

THEOCLEIA. Hideous doctrine!

[*Sounds of approval mingled with song come from those with* PAUL *below.*]

THEKLA. [*Coming forward.*] Now you have heard, mother, why I can no longer think of wedding with Thamyris.

THEOCLEIA. Any proper maiden would feel honored to be his wife. But here you are, seven-and-twenty years, and still

unmarried. Stubbornly you sit there, listening to the nonsense yonder crack-brain babbles and think it wisdom, when little you know of the world beyond these four walls. [*To* DORCAS, *in a low voice.*] Call Thamyris!

[DORCAS *departs, Right.*]

THEKLA. But, mother dear, was I not in Jerusalem with my departed father, and saw beloved Stephen give up his life cheerfully for this same God? My heart cannot efface him.

THEOCLEIA. You still persist in holding to that callow, girlhood fancy?

THEKLA. Never will I forget his angel-look and calm bearing in the very face of death. When pompous Saul thrust me aside, Stephen bade me go, promising his God would come to me. And that He has, at last—after eleven years of patient waiting.

THEOCLEIA. You've lost your head.

THEKLA. [*Returning to the window.*] See, mother, look you —the many wives and maidens entering the house of Onesipherous, where the wonderful preacher is. Oh, would I might also be deemed worthy to appear before him and hear the living word.

[THAMYRIS *rushes in, Right. He is a well-built young Greek, of noble bearing and demeanor.*]

THAMYRIS. [*Impetuously.*] Thekla!

[*Absorbed in what she views through the window,* THEKLA *is unaware of* THAMYRIS' *entrance. As he is about to go to her,* THEOCLEIA *restrains him.*]

THEOCLEIA. One moment, Thamyris! I have something strange to tell you.

THAMYRIS. About Thekla? Well—

THEOCLEIA. For days and nights now, she has refused to

move from the window, not even to eat or drink. But gazing out, as if upon some pleasant sight, she has become so devoted to a foreigner's deceitful teachings, that I wonder how a maiden of her known modesty could be prevailed upon so shamefully.

THAMYRIS. Thekla too?

THEOCLEIA. You know of others?

THAMYRIS. Since the fellow's arrival, all Iconium has been disturbed. Though hearing of other youths, threatened with the loss of their prospective wives, yet never dreamed I to be so hit. All our maidens seem to be flocking to him. What can be the villain's fascination?

THEOCLEIA. He declares there is but a single God, and that to worship Him one must live chastely.

THAMYRIS. [*With a forced laugh.*] A new madness! Yet, hardly designed for pleasure-loving Greeks.

[*Overhearing this last,* THEKLA *shoots a look of mingled pity and contempt at* THAMYRIS.]

THEOCLEIA. Notwithstanding, Thekla, like a spider's web fastened to the window, seems captivated by the wretch's harangues. Speak to her, Thamyris!

THAMYRIS. [*Approaching her.*] Dearest Thekla, my betrothed, why sit you in this melancholy posture? [*Pauses for reply, but getting none continues.*] What strange feeling overpowers you? Come, beloved, turn to your Thamyris! [*Though he holds out his arm,* THEKLA *remains unmoved.*]

THEOCLEIA. [*Approaching* THEKLA.] My child! [THEKLA *repels her.*]

PAUL. [*Off stage.*] Blessed are they who for the love of Christ Jesus abandon the glories of the world, for they shall be placed at His right hand and not suffer the bitterness of the last judgment.

THEKLA. [*As if talking to herself.*] For His love will I gladly abandon this world's glories.

THEOCLEIA. [*Coming down-stage.*] I have lost my daughter.

THAMYRIS. [*Following* THEOCLEIA.] And I—a wife.

THEKLA. [*Blissfully.*] While I have gained the knowledge of God.

THAMYRIS. [*As if remembering suddenly.*] All is not lost yet, Lady Theocleia; for outside two men wait who shall give us counsel. When Thekla hears their story, she may relent.

THEOCLEIA. Summon them!

THAMYRIS. [*Crossing to door, Right, opens it and calls.*] This way!

[*Enter* DEMAS *and* HERMOGENES, *grim-looking Jews.* THEKLA *steals a look at them. She is aware of all that goes on, though appearing not to be.*]

DEMAS. [*Bowing to* THAMYRIS.] Your grace—

HERMOGENES. Your ladyship. [*Bows to* THEOCLEIA.]

THAMYRIS. Know you men this scamp who steals away the minds of our young women?

DEMAS. We accompanied him from Lystra, whence the Roman authorities ejected him, on complaint of the Jews, for disturbance of the peace.

THAMYRIS. Who and what is he?

HERMOGENES. They call him Paul—the agitator.

THEKLA. [*Repeats with rapture.*] Paul.

DEMAS. [*Craftily.*] We have been unable to learn just who he is; but from following him, we do know that he makes a practice of depriving young men of their intended wives, and

maidens of their affianced husbands. [*To which* HERMOGENES *nods emphatic approval.*]

THEOCLEIA. Unspeakable swine!

THAMYRIS. By what power does he these things?

DEMAS. By declaring there can be no salvation without virtue.

[*Overhearing this,* THEKLA *registers ecstatic look.*]

THAMYRIS. Salvation? What is that?

HERMOGENES. Not being a Jew, most noble Greek, it is only natural you should not understand. Salvation is what we of Israel are all looking for—spiritual deliverance from sin and death.

THAMYRIS. Pray inform me then: what are the special teachings of this fellow Paul? I too would know; for I am sore distressed about my betrothed, seeing she is so much impressed as to prevent me from marrying her.

[THEKLA *strains forward so as not to miss a word.*]

DEMAS. And you would break his spell over her?

THAMYRIS. Surely!

DEMAS. [*Proceeding insidiously, as* THEOCLEIA *and* THAMYRIS *draw near.*] Then let him be brought before Iconium's Governor, as one who endeavors to persuade its people into the outlawed religion of the accursed Nazarene; whereupon, that magistrate, according to a recent edict of Caesar, will have to have this Paul put to death.

[THEKLA *listens breathlessly, as they parley, with their heads together.*]

PAUL. [*Off stage, sonorously.*] Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not, oh my beloved brethren!

DEMAS. Only in that way, worthy Thamyris, will you break his spell and win back her whom you love.

THEOCLEIA. A likely plan, Thamyris, since Castelius, the Governor, is your good friend.

THAMYRIS. But tell me this: why are you men so eager to have Paul made away with?

HERMOGENES. Because he is a traitor to Israel, an apostate.

[*This accusation brings back to* THEKLA *memories of* STEPHEN'S *fate; and for a moment great terror is reflected in her face.*]

DEMAS. [*With bitterness.*] Aye, and much more, too!

THAMYRIS. Though I pretend not to understand your charges, my friends, yet I believe them to be true. The scoundrel shall suffer. Not only for the things you say, but for his perverting of Iconian maidens—among them, Thekla, my beloved.

HERMOGENES. Do this, most noble Greek, and all our people will praise you.

DEMAS. And may God have mercy on you, Gentile though you are.

PAUL. [*Off stage.*] Wherefore, in conclusion, you are reminded ever to do by others as you would be done by. This summarizes all the Law and the Prophets.

HERMOGENES. [*Running to the window.*] That's the blasphemer now, twisting Holy Writ to suit his own nefarious ends.

THEOCLEIA. Make haste, Thamyris, lest he escape!

THAMYRIS. We'll bring him before the Governor, instantly. Come, sirs! [DEMAS *and* HERMOGENES *pass out, Right. Making a final effort to regain* THEKLA'S *favor,* THAMYRIS *holds out his arms to her.*] Thekla, dear!

[THEKLA *does not respond, as she is looking out of the window. Nettled,* THAMYRIS *turns quickly and retires, Right, followed by* THEOCLEIA *who is plainly out of sorts with her daughter.*]

THEKLA. [*As if coming to life suddenly, jumps up.*] Quick, Dorcas—the basket! [*Runs to door, Left. It opens and* DORCAS *appears.*] The basket, make haste!

DORCAS. But think, Mistress Thekla—the danger!

THEKLA. [*Sharply.*] Do as I command. God's man Paul is in far greater danger. The bloodthirsty Jews are bent on taking his life as they did dear Stephen's. Do you hear me—bring the basket![DORCAS *disappears into the room, Left.*] And bring the silver mirror and my jewels too. Above all, hurry—hurry, Dorcas!

[*As* THEKLA *re-arranges her dress in preparation for flight,* DORCAS *comes back with a large basket, to the two sides of which a stout rope is fastened. She also has the other articles, which* THEKLA *seizes.*]

DORCAS. [*Dragging basket to window.*] But I'm afraid—

THEKLA. Forget your fears and let me down, quick now, that I may warn him!

[THEKLA *climbs into the basket, on the window-sill.* DORCAS *wraps the rope around a nearby chair-leg several times, to break the force.* THEKLA *pushes the basket off the sill and disappears, as* DORCAS *pays out the rope.*]

END OF SCENE THREE

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

THE WISEMAN. [*Before the curtain.*]

At the behest of spurned Thamyris,
All Iconium is astir.
Paul has been hunted out and taken,
For uttering unlawful doctrine.
Much as it is today, even then,
New teachings, while welcome to the people,
Were frowned upon by those in power.

As soon as was the maiden Thekla missed,
Into the highways militants streamed,
Demanding that the illegal sect,
Which lured her, be put to sword.
There followed a search which lashed
The whole town into a fury.
Pandemonium was unleashed,
That penetrated every nook and cranny,
To find the obstinate betrothed—
The wayward damsel, independent,
When woman's first duty was to obey.

Comes now a scene that beggars fiction,
Conceived by God, the Master Dramatist of all,
Wherein is staged the entire sweep of hell and heaven.
Here in the meanest of gaol-cells, you glimpse
The tragic denouement of two wracked souls,
Put to the sublime test of their great faith.

The curtain rises on night's darkest hour.
A day of new experience labors to be born.

SCENE FOUR

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

PAUL, *now the Apostle to the Gentiles.*
EUSYBUS, *the gaoler.*
THEKLA.
THAMYRIS.
THEOCLEIA.
CASTELIUS, *the Governor of Iconium.*

Roman soldiers.

SCENE: *A dank, dingy, underground chamber, in Iconium's gaol. High up in the wall, Left, there is a grating through which daylight appears, later on. All is in darkness now, the hour being just past midnight, save for a flickering torch outside the barred door, back Right, which sheds faint light into the cell.*

The rising curtain reveals PAUL *chained, Center, reclining on a bit of straw. Eleven years older now, he is heavily bearded. Although an humble Nazarene, in moments of great stress, a suggestion of the former* SAUL *crops out. But* PAUL *promptly subdues him. A more complete change never came over any strong man. In spite of his confinement he is resigned and at peace. On a bench outside the cell-door, back Right,* EUSYBUS, *the gaoler, dozes.*

PAUL. [*In prayerful attitude.*] The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? I know that His judgments are right and that in faithfulness He has afflicted me. How many are the days of Thy servant, oh Lord? When wilt Thou execute judgment on them that persecute me? Depart from me, ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of God! Though small and despised, yet do I not forget Thy precepts.

[PAUL *lies down to sleep.* EUSYBUS *awakens a moment later, following a loud snore: stands up, stretches and looks*

through the barred door. Seeing PAUL *asleep, he throws a faggot at him.*]

EUSYBUS. Hey, there—wake up!

PAUL. [*Sitting up.*] Well?

EUSYBUS. What you here for, if not to keep me company, through the long night-watch?

PAUL. Come inside then, that we may discourse better.

EUSYBUS. Not allowed to get too familiar with our gaol-birds.

PAUL. [*Nodding.*] Once I thought likewise, when hounding men and women, for the same cause I myself am now here.

EUSYBUS. Somewhat down on your luck?

PAUL. One can't hurl a stone against heaven and not expect it to fall upon his head.

EUSYBUS. All goes up—comes down, eh? [*Chuckles.*]

PAUL. Tell me, my friend, what is your name?

EUSYBUS. Eusybus—why?

PAUL. In you I see a faithful servant, good Eusybus; wherefore you should be in the service of our Lord.

EUSYBUS. Does he pay better than Caesar?

PAUL. Aye, many times!

EUSYBUS. [*Unlocking the cell-door.*] How much?

PAUL. As much as you desire—

EUSYBUS. [*Entering cell, closes door.*] Then I'm for him.

PAUL.—and you prove yourself to be worth.

EUSYBUS. [*Snorting.*] Oh! I knew there'd be some catch. But what's your Master's name? Tell me about Him!

PAUL. Gladly, friend Eusybus, and will enroll you in His service too.

[*Approaching footsteps heard, off Right.*]

EUSYBUS. Sh-h-h-h—someone's coming. [*Stepping out of cell, calls.*] Who's there?

[THEKLA *appears outside the barred door.*]

PAUL. A woman—unattended—at this hour?

EUSYBUS. What do you want?

THEKLA. I came to see Rabbi Paul.

EUSYBUS. [*Gruffly.*] Don't know him.

PAUL. [*Stepping as near the door as his chain will permit.*] The lady means me, good Eusybus.

THEKLA. [*Her face against the bars.*] Yes—him!

EUSYBUS. Your father?

THEKLA. Oh, no!

EUSYBUS. [*In the doorway, looks from one to the other.*] Husband?

THEKLA. Nor that.

EUSYBUS. Can't admit you then—this time o' night. The scandal—

PAUL. [*Firmly but gently.*] Let her in, my brother!

THEKLA. Yes, please, do.

EUSYBUS. Caesar's orders strictly forbid loose women visiting prisoners.

PAUL. Forshame, Eusybus!

THEKLA. [*Swallowing her indignation, produces jewels.*]

Look, I will give you these—my bracelets, and here's a valuable silver mirror too—if you will only let me in to see Rabbi Paul.

EUSYBUS. [*Now interested, steps out and lights up* THEKLA'S *face with a torch.*] Add a kiss and it's a bargain.

[*As* EUSYBUS *is about to force a kiss from* THEKLA, PAUL *strains at his chain bristlingly, but speedily regains control of himself. Unafraid,* THEKLA *stands her ground.*]

PAUL. [*Commandingly.*] In my Master's service, Eusybus, which just now you expressed a desire to enter, honest men do not take such liberties with women. Admit her! [EUSYBUS *steps aside;* THEKLA *enters the cell; he follows, amazed at himself for obeying his prisoner's order.*] Welcome, sister, and may God's peace attend you. [*To* EUSYBUS, *as* THEKLA *hesitates.*] Leave us, please!

EUSYBUS. A lady's man! Who'd have thought it? Ha, ha! [*Goes to his bench outside, back Right, where he proceeds to examine the articles received from* THEKLA.]

PAUL. [*Addressing* THEKLA.] And now, who may you be?

THEKLA. A most unhappy woman.

PAUL. [*Restraining her as she would kiss his chain.*] God does not mean for any of His children to be unhappy.

THEKLA. But I am not one of your God's children. I am a Greek.

[EUSYBUS *dozes off again.*]

PAUL. There is only one God—the God of Jew and Gentile —mine, yours and everyone's, of whatever race or color, whether we be bond or free. With God there is no respect of persons. So, be of good cheer, daughter; for as you desire, so shall it be meted unto you.

THEKLA. I am sorely troubled, Rabbi.

PAUL. That same God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in every trouble. It grieves me to be able to offer you no better hospitality; but come, sit here and tell me what oppresses you.

[PAUL *re-arranges his bit of straw, to share it with* THEKLA. *She sits at his feet.*]

THEKLA. I am Thekla, betrothed to one called Thamyris, whom I can never wed.

PAUL. Thamyris? Why, that was the name of him who had me apprehended.

THEKLA. [*Sobbing.*] And mine the fault you are here held, in chains.

PAUL. Yours?

THEKLA. Vainly did I try to give you warning; wherefore I am the more miserable and have much fear for your safety.

PAUL. [*Patting her head.*] All is faith, Thekla. There is no fear.

THEKLA. You know not the evil intentions of those who are against you.

PAUL. If God be for us—who can stand against us?

THEKLA. You really think so?

PAUL. I know so. And this I also know: that all things work together for good, to them that love God.

THEKLA. They do? [*Fascinated by what she hears,* THEKLA *sidles up closer to* PAUL.]

PAUL. But tell me, why you cannot wed with your betrothed?

THEKLA. Because, sitting in my window for many days past, I have listened to none but you, Master Paul, preaching in

a neighboring house that it is better in the sight of God for maidens to remain as they are.

PAUL. You overheard me?

THEKLA. [*Nodding.*] And I would preserve myself so as to be found wholly acceptable unto that God.

PAUL. Praised be He from Whom all blessings flow! And that brought you here?

THEKLA. That and the desire to get more instruction concerning your God's Christ-Son.

PAUL. Glory of glories! But tell me, when had you the first glimmering of this light?

THEKLA. Eleven years ago. The sweetheart of my girlhood was one of your early saints.

PAUL. [*As she pauses to wipe a tear away.*] Go on!

THEKLA. He sought to win me over, but I took no interest then. Going to Jerusalem, he excited the fury of the Jews and was stoned to death.

PAUL. [*Horror coming into his eyes.*] His name?

THEKLA. Stephen—perhaps you knew him.

PAUL. [*Nodding slowly.*] Yes, I knew him and I consented unto his death.

THEKLA. Y-y-you—you—did that?

PAUL. I guarded the raiment of them that slew the lad.

THEKLA. [*Springing up.*] Then your name is not Paul—but Saul! [*Now recognizing him for the first time.*]

PAUL. [*Lowering his head.*] I am Paul—but I was Saul.

THEKLA. [*Shuddering.*] U-u-ugh!

PAUL. [*Not yet identifying her.*] Why, what is it?

THEKLA. [*Retreating beyond the length of his chain as he steps toward her.*] You are he that denied my appeal for mercy.

PAUL. [*Bewildered.*] You—appealed—to me?

THEKLA. Outside the walls of Jerusalem.

PAUL. [*Holding his head.*] Yes, now I remember. A maiden did curse me to endure eternal suffering—

THEKLA. I was that one.

PAUL. Then know you have been answered; for Stephen's spectre is ever before me.

THEKLA. [*Bracing herself against the barred door.*] And to you, who helped to murder that harmless youth, I have come this night, into your foul prison-cell, risking my all. Oh, wretched woman, why was I ever born?

PAUL. That you might bear testimony unto Jesus, the Christ.

THEKLA. Scoff not!

PAUL. Before God, I do not.

THEKLA. [*Bitterly.*] So, the self-righteous Saul, as turn-coat Paul, now preaches the faith he formerly persecuted. Ugh! [*Struggles for self-control.*]

PAUL. [*Thoroughly humble.*] None knows better than myself, Thekla, that I deserve all your scorn and reproach, since beyond measure I did outrage our dear Lord's church and waste it.

THEKLA. How could you—oh, how could you do it?

PAUL. Because then I was Saul, the Sanhedrin's scourge. In blinded zeal did I ransack Jerusalem, seeking them that emulated Him Who died on Calvary; for which now I ceaselessly pray God's pardon, since I did it ignorantly in unbelief. But on the road to Damascus the Divine Truth

was revealed to me, my mad career suddenly arrested and the veil torn from my eyes; for I there saw in Jesus of Nazareth, Whom I was persecuting, my Savior and Redeemer—Israel's long-promised Messiah.

THEKLA. With your own eyes, you saw God's son? [*Fascinated by this recital* THEKLA *forgets her aversion and begins to draw near* PAUL *again.*]

PAUL. [*Sitting down.*] Aye, daughter, I saw Him. Yet not with these poor organs of the flesh [*Indicating his eyes.*] by which we mortals are always deceived. But through the eyes of the Spirit was The Christ made visible to me, in His transcendant glory. In the dazzling brilliance of that moment, Saul was stricken to earth; and in his place arose another man—Paul. Saul had fallen in death; but Paul arose in life. The former had fallen in the midst of things temporal; while I arose in the sweet consciousness of things eternal. Saul had fallen a proud, intolerant, persecuting Jew; Paul arose an humble, forgiving, penitent Nazarene. I awoke in Jesus Christ, for God had found me.

THEKLA. [*Eagerly, as he pauses.*] And then what?

PAUL. All was dark, for I was blind. Two of the brethren led me into Damascus, dejected and trembling—no longer breathing threats and slaughter, but yearning only to be a suppliant and learner—the lowliest among those I had intended to destroy. After three days of fasting and prayer, the scales of blindness fell from my eyes. Returning to Jerusalem, I made several attempts to associate myself with the disciples; but they feared me, remembering my loathesome past, until Barnabas came and vouched for me. Ever the Jews persisted in trying to take my life. Then, while praying in the Temple, one day, I fell asleep. Again I saw Jesus, and He said to me: "Make haste and leave Jerusalem, for they will not accept your testimony about Me. But go! I will send you as an Apostle to nations, far away." Thus it happened I set out to scatter the Gospel Seed, eight years ago; and I thank

God it has sprouted and taken firm root in many a human soul—in many a town and country. [*Calmness and serenity glow in his face.*]

THEKLA. [*Now at his feet once more, completely absorbed.*] You said that on the Damascan Way the Divine Truth was revealed to you.

PAUL. Aye, daughter, that it was.

THEKLA. What is that Truth, Master?

PAUL. It comprises all there is of good, which is but another name for God; wherefore Truth is infinite. It is salvation's open sesame which, once understood, gives man dominion over everything, as the Creator meant him to possess. Truth is that Divine First Cause, superior to all other causes, which governs the Universe, the rock of ages, the all-inclusive, irresistible and immutable power—in fact the only power—omnipresent, the same yesterday, today and forever. It encompasses all wisdom, all understanding, and is Eternity's master-key—the only possession really worth our striving for. That, my child, is Truth.

THEKLA. Would that I possessed it.

PAUL. 'Tis equally available to everyone.

THEKLA. How can I gain it?

PAUL. Our Lord said: "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you."

THEKLA. [*Searching his face.*] You mean that?

PAUL. Verily, "for everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."

[*Night having worn away, the sun's first rays stream through the window-grating, Left, lighting up the cell a little more. Approaching footsteps heard, off Right.* EUSYBUS *awakens with a start.*]

EUSYBUS. [*In the doorway.*] Get out, woman! Someone's coming.

THEKLA. [*Shrinking close to* PAUL.] No, no!

EUSYBUS. [*Entering cell, tries to pull* THEKLA *away.*] Hurry—or I'll lose my job.

PAUL. Fear not, Eusybus! God will protect you.

[THAMYRIS *appears in the doorway. As he does,* EUSYBUS *steps in front of* THEKLA, *to conceal her.*]

THAMYRIS. Is the prisoner Paul here?

EUSYBUS. Aye, sir.

THAMYRIS. Then, open up! The Governor comes to make an end of the felon.

THEKLA. [*To* PAUL.] Thamyris.

[*As* EUSYBUS *goes to the door, to open it,* THEKLA *is exposed.* PAUL *tries to push her behind himself; but* THAMYRIS *spies her before she can be hidden.*]

THAMYRIS. [*Bursting into the cell.*] A woman! So, they even follow him to prison. [*Jerks* THEKLA *rudely to see her face, which she has covered with her hands.*] Thekla! [*Laughing savagely, as he calls through the barred door.*] Ho, you! Here she is—and with him—just as I expected.

[*Enter* CASTELIUS, *the Roman governor of Iconium, rather an insignificant figure.* THEOCLEIA *follows. An escort of soldiers halts outside the cell-door.*]

THEOCLEIA. Thekla—the disgrace!

THAMYRIS. You see, had we come here as soon as she was missed, as I proposed, we'd have been spared our all-night search of Iconium.

THEOCLEIA. But I couldn't believe it of her.

CASTELIUS. You can believe anything of women, nowadays.

THAMYRIS. [*Addressing* THEKLA.] Ungrateful maiden! You have made me the laughing stock of the whole city, by slinking off here to your paramour in the night. I could kill you both.

[*In jealous rage,* THAMYRIS *leaps at* PAUL *and* THEKLA, *as if to make good his threat.* PAUL *never flinches;* THEKLA *shrieks for fright. Soldiers rush in at a signal from* CASTELIUS *and hold* THAMYRIS *back.*]

CASTELIUS. The law will attend to that, Thamyris.

PAUL. Even so, Governor, the Law! All of which is fulfilled in one sentence—"thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

CASTELIUS. Silence, shameless!

THEOCLEIA. Come, my child—come with me. [*As she approaches,* THEKLA *sidles up closer to* PAUL.] See, the villain has bewitched her.

THAMYRIS. He's a sorcerer, Castelius. Let him die!

CASTELIUS. [*Addressing* PAUL.] Is it true you teach matrimony to be unlawful?

PAUL. Not unlawful, worthy Governor. Neither is it a condition wholly desirable for its own sake, in the eyes of the one absolute God.

CASTELIUS. Then what do you think we're here for?

PAUL. To reverence God and keep His commandments. That is the whole duty of man.

CASTELIUS. And what would your God of us?

PAUL. Our reclamation from wickedness and corruption, from all sinful pleasures and weaknesses of the flesh, and from this living death.

CASTELIUS. [*With a sneering laugh.*] Who ever heard of a living death?

PAUL. Most noble Castelius, for this purpose God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Whom I preach and in Whom I instruct men to place their hopes, as the sole one having compassion on a deluded world, that it might not be condemned. Wherefore, oh Governor, we should have faith, the fear of the Lord and the love of Truth. So that, if I teach only these things which I have received direct from God by revelation—where is my crime? And why am I here, in chains?

CASTELIUS. [*Unable to answer* PAUL, *turns to* THAMYRIS.] What say you?

THAMYRIS. That he is a smooth-tongued liar and should die.

CASTELIUS. Yet, none of these things are capital offenses in the Codex Romanorum, however reprehensible they may otherwise be.

THEOCLEIA. But, Governor—

THAMYRIS. [*Breaking in.*] You see how he has seduced my betrothed, one-time modest daughter of the noble Lady Theocleia—now his brazen, unashamed night-guest. Surely, that is a crime.

THEOCLEIA. Come home, Thekla.

THEKLA. No, no!

THAMYRIS. There, Castelius, you have her own confession.

CASTELIUS. [*Addressing* THEKLA.] Why will you not, according to Iconian law, wed with Thamyris?

THEKLA. Because I cannot.

THEOCLEIA. [*In a sudden fit of anger.*] Then let the obstinate hussy be thrown to the wild beasts. [*Refusing to be stopped by* THAMYRIS.] Let her be exposed naked, in the

arena, as a warning to all other rebellious maidens to avoid her practices.

PAUL. [*As* THEKLA *cowers closer.*] And you the mother that travailed for her? God forgive you, unhappy lady!

CASTELIUS. Nay, Theocleia, not that. But this nasty fellow shall be flogged out of the city. [*Indicating* PAUL.]

THEKLA. No, no! That may God prevent. [*She threatens to become hysterical, but for* PAUL'S *gentleness with her.*]

CASTELIUS. [*To* THEKLA.] You shall return home. [*Turning to* THEOCLEIA.] Persuasion, I am sure, will yet make her faithful to Thamyris—or sterner methods shall be invoked to enforce her submission.

THAMYRIS. [*Extending his arms to* THEKLA.] Come!

THEKLA. Never! [*Links her arm in that of* PAUL.]

CASTELIUS. [*To the soldiers.*] Whip him out!

[*Thrusting* THEKLA *aside, the soldiers unshackle* PAUL *and beat him out of the cell, with rods. He never whimpers. Vainly* THEKLA *tries to cling to* PAUL*; but* THAMYRIS *tears her away and leads her off forcibly, followed by* THEOCLEIA *and* CASTELIUS.]

END OF SCENE FOUR

CURTAIN

THE WISEMAN. [*Before the curtain.*]

Paul, a full-fledged missioner of Christ,
His ambassage pursues throughout the East.
And still, Jerusalem's saints reject him
As a firebrand, an ever-constant danger,
Threatening to embroil the Temple hosts.
Hence, gladly they consented
To his journeyings afar. Good riddance was it
And for the Gospel's spread most fortunate.

No world-vision held the Twelve,
Though Isaiah had said that when Messias came,
He should be the Redeemer of all nations—
For Gentiles as well as for the Jews.
Paul saw and, seeing, he was ever zealous
To plant the sacred seed in every soil.
Christ should not sink into another Hebrew sect;
For in Jesus he beheld the world's great Light,
Healer of all souls, anointed in Godhood.
His one desire was to realize
The Savior's prayer for human unity.

Three years after being driven from Iconium
Finds Paul in Pisidian Antioch, a Roman colony,
On a feast-day of deific Jupiter.
With Barnabas he strays into the orgy
And assails the idol-worship.
Amid coarse jeers, they call him "Christian,"*
That being the first use of the sweet name
Which, from a mocking epithet, was destined
To become a badge of worldwide honor.
Then God gave Paul a wonder to perform,
The doing whereof so amazed the fickle mob,
An outburst followed, the like of which
None here has probably ever seen. But wait—
Attend now the event's unfolding!

**Pronounced*: *Christ-i-an.*

SCENE FIVE

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

MARCUS
CIMBER } *citizens of Antioch.*
BURRIO

LEPIDUS, *chief of Jupiter's temple guards.*
CYRUS, *a cripple.*
PAUL.
BARNABAS, *his companion.*
ALEXANDER, *the high priest of Jupiter.*
EZRA.
DEMAS.
HERMOGENES.
THEKLA.
DORCAS.

Greeks, Romans, Pisidians, Priestesses of Juno,
Temple guards, Soldiers, Etc.

SCENE: *Antioch's public square, a paved, open space, surrounded by impressive buildings, of classical outline. At the Left stands the pillared Temple of Jupiter, fronted by a massive sacrificial altar. Statuary in profusion, here and there. Roadways cross the square diagonally. Everything is gaily decorated with colors and garlands, for celebration of the festival of Jupiter, under Roman auspices.*

The rise of the curtain discloses great throngs of Greeks, Romans, native Pisidians, and others surging through the square, in honor of the holiday. All manner of persons make up the crowd, from rabble to aristocrat. A spirit of pagan abandon prevails.

Three years have elapsed since the last scene.

MARCUS. Great is Jupiter.

VOICES. [*Of cheering crowd.*] Aye, aye—great is Jupiter.

CIMBER. Greatest of all gods is he.

BURRIO. Give us joy, oh Jove!

VOICES. Joy, joy—give us joy.

MARCUS. How quickly our petition is answered; for see—joy comes!

[*Following a flourish of trumpets, guards of Jupiter's temple led by* LEPIDUS, *enter back Right, and after them come strewers of flowers.*]

LEPIDUS. Make way for the daughters of Juno!

VOICES. Hail, the daughters of Juno!

CIMBER. Welcome, Olympian maids—welcome!

[*As the dancers come forward, a misshapen cripple, called* CYRUS, *is seen following with much difficulty.*]

MARCUS. Look who comes to mar this feast of beauty with his hideousness!

[*Crowd roars its dissatisfaction at* CYRUS.]

LEPIDUS. Out of the way, "crip!"

[LEPIDUS *gives* CYRUS *a kick, sending him against the temple porch, Left, like a football. To the jeers of the heartless crowd,* CYRUS *nurses his hurts like an abused dog.*]

BURRIO. [*As the dancers resume their evolutions.*] How good to live under such beneficent gods who let us want for nothing.

[*When the revel reaches its height,* PAUL *and* BARNABAS *appear, back Left.* BARNABAS *is a venerable disciple and benign looking. For a time, the newcomers are unnoticed.*]

MARCUS. There are no gods like our gods. Hence make we a Roman holiday.

VOICES. [*Amid noisy cheering.*] Great is Jupiter.

CIMBER. The very greatest of all the gods is he.

BURRIO. [*Observing* PAUL *and* BARNABAS.] All hail!

MARCUS. Praise ye not the omnipotent one?

BARNABAS. [*Coming forward, with* PAUL.] Assuredly!

CIMBER. Then shout with us—for Jupiter.

PAUL. [*Gently.*] But he is not omnipotent.

BURRIO. Jupiter not omnipotent?

[*The crowd begins to hoot and howl.*]

BARNABAS. They are no gods that are made with hands. [*Pointing to the statues.*]

PAUL. You Greeks and Romans have so many divinities, it is easier to find a god among you than a man. [*Roars of disapproval grow.*] Yet are you ignorant of the one true God.

CIMBER. You mean some other than Olympian Jove?

BARNABAS. Aye, my brothers.

[*The crowd closes in around* PAUL *and* BARNABAS.]

MARCUS. [*Sneeringly.*] Sure they do. Look at their noses. Hooks like those could never smell out Jupiter. Vainly has he hurled his thunderbolts, into Judea's darkness.

PAUL. Yet there have we received a light far brighter—that shed by the One and only true God, Who governs all with love and kindness.

VOICES. [*Of crowd yelling and screeching, to drown out* PAUL *and* BARNABAS.] Revilers—defamers—slanderers!

BARNABAS. Hear us but a moment. Pause just a little in your revelling—for your souls' sake.

CIMBER. [*Laughing smartly.*] For our soles' sake? You must think our brains are in our feet.

BURRIO. Say, who are you fellows—so bold as to intrude upon our festival for almighty Jove?

VOICES. Aye, aye—who—who are you?

PAUL. [*Commanding silence.*] Men and brethren: we come to declare unto you glad tidings. How that the promise made unto Abraham, God has fulfilled by sending us His beloved Son Jesus, to save all mankind from the ravages of sin, sickness and death. [*A titter runs through the crowd.*] Yet, Him the people knew not as their Redeemer and crucified, after which, the Father raised Him up as a proof of the life everlasting.

VOICES. [*Amid derisive shouts.*] Shut him up—aye, shut him up!

PAUL. Behold, ye despisers—wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, which ye shall in no wise believe, although a man declare it unto you, in the name of Jesus, the Christ.

MARCUS. Now I know them. They're followers of that Christos, the vagabond of Nazareth, who sought to turn the world upside down by arraying the poor against the rich, and left nothing but disorder in his wake. They're Christians —that's what they are. [*This last with marked contempt.*]

BURRIO. Christians—that's good. [*He guffaws raucously.*]

VOICES. [*Accompanied by coarse laughter.*] Aye, Christians, Christians!

[*The crowd, now more like a mob, threatening to do him and* BARNABAS *violence,* PAUL *lifts his right hand commandingly. All fall back in silence, looking from one to the other starkly amazed.*]

PAUL. Call us what you will, men of Antioch! But that name, which is hurled in scorn today, shall yet become an honored one, throughout the whole, wide world.

BURRIO. Give him your ears no longer.

[*Though trying to comply, the crowd finds itself completely awed by* PAUL, *and listens respectfully.*]

PAUL. You declare Jupiter omnipotent. With what power for good has he invested you? Speak! [*All seem dumb.*] Him we worship, in spirit and in truth, has commanded us, as a service to our fellow men—even you—to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons.

MARCUS. Execrable, foreign superstition!

PAUL. [*Addressing* CYRUS, *who has crept close to him.*] In you, my brother, I perceive some faith. Stand upright, on your feet!

CYRUS. [*Straightens slowly in obedience to* PAUL'S *command and then jumps up*] I am whole—whole!

CIMBER. The beggar walks. A miracle!

CYRUS. [*Leaping for joy.*] And I have been crippled from my mother's womb.

PAUL. [*Addressing* CYRUS.] For your healing, friend, give praise to the One Absolute God.

CYRUS. [*At* PAUL'S *feet.*] And to you, Master. [*Kisses the hem of* PAUL'S *garment.*]

MARCUS. These are wonder-workers.

[*Now the volatile Antiochans swarm admiringly around* PAUL *and* BARNABAS, *whom but a moment before they were on the point of assaulting.*]

BURRIO. Verily, the gods have put on human forms and come down among us, from high Olympus.

CIMBER. The tall and venerable one must be Jupiter. [*Indicating* BARNABAS.]

[PAUL *and* BARNABAS *vainly try to address the crowd.*]

VOICES. Great is Jupiter! Hail, almighty Jove!

MARCUS. And see, the younger, shorter one, who speaks so eloquently—he is Mercury. [*Indicating* PAUL, *who is dumbfounded by this latest turn.*]

VOICES. [*Of crowd circling around* PAUL.] Welcome, messenger of delight—welcome!

BURRIO. Fortunate is Antioch indeed, to be vouchsafed such a visitation, this day.

PAUL. [*Summoning up all the energy at his command.*] Only harken, ye men—

MARCUS. [*Drowning* PAUL'S *appeal.*] Call Jove's priest and bring the sacred oxen!

[LEPIDUS *salutes. In response to his signal, several of the temple guards dash out, back Right.*]

BARNABAS. [*Showing some concern.*] What make you of this, Brother Paul? Can God have entered their hearts?

PAUL. Not our God, I fear. [*Trying to address the crowd again.*] Oh men of Antioch, listen—

CIMBER. [*Interrupting* PAUL.] Praise be to Jupiter and Mercury that they have deigned to visit us; and joy that we did not fail to recognize them.

VOICES. Aye, aye—praise and joy—joy and praise!

[*Into the madly rejoicing crowd,* ALEXANDER, *high-priest of Jupiter's temple, drives the sacred oxen, from back Right. They are beribboned and garlanded.* ALEXANDER *is a large, sleek, leering man. The demonstration grows.*]

VOICES. Hail, all hail—Alexander!

ALEXANDER. [*In a voice that fairly reverberates.*] Where is Olympian Jove and his winged messenger?

VOICES. [*From all sides.*] Here, most sacrosanct one, here!

[*Members of the crowd point to* BARNABAS *and* PAUL, *both of whom seek to shrink from view.*]

ALEXANDER. That pair? [*Scanning them incredulously.*]

CYRUS. They made me whole, Worshipful.

BURRIO. They are surely wonder-workers.

[*The crowd chimes in approval.*]

ALEXANDER. [*Half facetiously.*] Accept a welcome then, almighty gods, from your devoted representative, here in Antioch. Come, enter your own temple, where a fitting sacrifice shall be made ready immediately.

[*Enthusiasts seize* PAUL *and* BARNABAS *and lift them to their shoulders, as* ALEXANDER *turns, Left, as if to enter the temple.*]

BARNABAS. [*Struggling.*] Down, down—

PAUL. [*With authority.*] I say—put us down!

MARCUS. As you most gracious divinities command. [*He directs the men to set* PAUL *and* BARNABAS *down; they obey.*]

[*Altar attendants prepare to slaughter the sacred oxen.*]

BARNABAS. And do not make any sacrifices unto us, oh men of Antioch.

PAUL. [*Vehemently.*] No, no—no!

CIMBER. But you are gods.

PAUL. [*As if horror-stricken.*] Oh sirs, why do you these idolatrous things?

BURRIO. Because from lofty Olympus you have come.

PAUL. You're wrong. We are merely men—Brother Barnabas here and I—with natures like your own. We bring you the good news that you are to turn from vanities like these —[*Indicating the impending sacrifice, the decorations, etc.*]

—and worship the Ever-living God, the Creator of heaven and earth and the sea, and of everything that is in them.

VOICES. Great is Jupiter! Mercury, all hail! [*Cheering grows in volume; as the crowd gives little heed to* PAUL.]

ALEXANDER. [*Addressing* PAUL.] What alien doctrine, this?

[*Seeing there is no let-up in the preparations for the sacrificial ceremony,* PAUL *and* BARNABAS *appeal directly to members of the crowd.*]

MARCUS. I think they are merely trying us out, to see if we can be deceived.

[*Disappointed in* PAUL *and* BARNABAS, *for having cast a gloom over the holiday, the crowd now hangs back.* EZRA, DEMAS *and* HERMOGENES *enter, Left.*]

EZRA. [*Seeing* PAUL.] By the nose of Ezekiel, there he is!

DEMAS. [*As the three rush at* PAUL.] We've caught up with you, at last.

HERMOGENES. And here's the other one. [*Indicating* BARNABAS.]

DEMAS. Fine charlatans!

ALEXANDER. What's that?

MARCUS. [*Addressing* DEMAS.] You dare call Jupiter and Mercury charlatans?

EZRA. These apostate Jews—Jupiter and Mercury? [*He laughs bitterly.*] By the bowels of Solomon, that's good.

CIMBER. Have a care!

DEMAS. So here they've palmed themselves off as gods. You poor Roman simpletons!

[*The crowd begins to murmur its displeasure.*]

ALEXANDER. [*Addressing the three Jews.*] What do you mean? Explain yourselves!

DEMAS. Where we came from, they purported to be something entirely different.

PAUL. [*To the Jewish trio.*] Though pretending to be righteous Jews, yet you scruple not to bear false witness, in violation of the laws of Moses.

ALEXANDER. Who are they?

EZRA. [*Confronting* PAUL.] This one is the worst liar since the stable-born carpenter of Galilee—that self-constituted Messiah, who associated with prostitutes and sought to ingratiate himself with the riff-raff by flattering their passions and stirring up hatred against the ruling classes.

BURRIO. [*As* BARNABAS *is about to speak.*] Hold your tongue?

EZRA. These twain are mighty rascals, oh men of Antioch, and trouble-makers, as you will find out, much to your sorrow, if you allow them to remain.

ALEXANDER. I believe that.

EZRA. For wrecking Derbe's peace, they were expelled.

DEMAS. [*Breaking in.*] And whipped out of Lystra.

HERMOGENES. As well as out of Iconium, for defiling the hearts of virgins.

EZRA. And that is not all!

CIMBER. Then Antioch should not receive them.

PAUL. [*As the crowd breaks into an uproar.*] Why not, my brother?

CYRUS. He made me walk. [*Indicating* PAUL.]

ALEXANDER. By sorcery's black arts.

PAUL. [*To* CYRUS.] God healed you, not I.

EZRA. Impostor! Surely for such blasphemy you will roast in Beelzebub's kitchen, like a capon. [*Turning to the crowd.*] Dead or alive, the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem will pay liberally for his carcass.

VOICES. [*Of members of the crowd, as they shake fists at* PAUL *and* BARNABAS.] Villains—mischief-makers!

ALEXANDER. For imposing on our people this festal day, let them be stoned!

VOICES. Aye, stone them—stone them!

[*The fickle men of Antioch, who but a moment before sought to worship* PAUL *and* BARNABAS *as gods from Olympus, now shower them with all sorts of missiles.*]

ALEXANDER. [*Chuckling.*] Jupiter and Mercury, eh?

PAUL. [*Fleeing before the mob with* BARNABAS.] It is through many afflictions that we have to make our way into the Kingdom of God. [*Pursued by the jeering mob, they pass off, back Left.*]

EZRA. This time, we must be sure to seal the traitor's doom.

DEMAS. Israel's avenging God demands the blood of His betrayers.

HERMOGENES. Aye, come, lest the would-be wreckers of our faith escape once more.

[EZRA, DEMAS *and* HERMOGENES *follow the mob off, back Left.*]

ALEXANDER. [*As the dancers emerge from the temple.*] On with the celebration, and make amends to Jupiter for this untoward interruption!

[*The dancers weave around the sacred oxen, as* THEKLA *enters, back Right, followed by* DORCAS.]

DORCAS. How will you ever find him, in all this gathering?

THEKLA. If Master Paul is here, he cannot remain long undiscovered to me.

DORCAS. [*As leering men press close.*] I fear these men.

THEKLA. Fear not! He will preserve us.

DORCAS. Don't you ever long for your home of comfort, Mistress Thekla, and all the treasures you abandoned in Iconium to follow after Paul?

THEKLA. No, Dorcas, for the only treasure worth having is the love of God.

ALEXANDER. [*Spying* THEKLA.] See the beauty—and quite alone, too!

MARCUS. She'll not be long, in this crowd.

ALEXANDER. To make sure, fetch her me, friend Marcus.

THEKLA. [*To* DORCAS.] Paul is not here. We'll go.

MARCUS. [*Approaching* THEKLA.] Your pardon, lady, but Jupiter's high-priest, the revered Alexander, desires a word.

THEKLA. With me?

MARCUS. Most eagerly.

THEKLA. I know him not. [*Turns Right, to go.*]

ALEXANDER. [*Stepping in front of* THEKLA.] You look lonesome. On such a day, none should be. My hospitality is—

THEKLA. [*After one glance at* ALEXANDER.] Come, Dorcas!

ALEXANDER. Not so hasty.

THEKLA. Let me pass!

[ALEXANDER *refusing to give way,* DORCAS *becomes alarmed and flees Left;* MARCUS *pursues her.*]

ALEXANDER. [*To* THEKLA, *brazenly.*] Try not to fool me! Innocence like you assume ventures not into such a holiday-ing crowd—in Antioch. [*He tries to take her arm.*]

THEKLA. [*Defiantly resisting him.*] Force not me who, though a stranger here, am a servant of the one true God.

ALEXANDER. Then there's a pair of us.

THEKLA. I am of a leading family, in Iconium.

ALEXANDER. So much the better. I am the same, of Antioch. [*He seizes her.*]

THEKLA. Release me! I am not what you think.

ALEXANDER. [*Grins at her struggles.*] That's good!

THEKLA. You are a wicked man.

ALEXANDER. But, lady—

THEKLA. I seek one who preaches God.

ALEXANDER. Answering that description, I'll take his place.

THEKLA. Never—never that!

ALEXANDER. [*Forcing a kiss on her.*] Sweet ladylove!

CIMBER. A wildcat, I'd say.

[*In fighting for her release,* THEKLA *rends* ALEXANDER'S *garments. The crowd gathers around to watch the contest and laughs at the high-priest's predicament.*]

ALEXANDER. [*Still holding* THEKLA.] For this you shall suffer, jade! I really meant well with you; but now you shall be burned—this very day—in Antioch's theatre, that all women may see the penalty for affronting the vicegerent of Jove.

BURRIO. [*Addressing* CIMBER.] You hear? She's to be burned to death.

THEKLA. [*As the crowd howls with anticipation.*] God is my defence.

ALEXANDER. The blazing spectacle will fittingly climax Jupiter's holiday.

THEKLA. [*Kneeling.*] Keep me holy and pure, oh God! And let me see dear Master Paul, only just once more.

ALEXANDER. Out of my sight—away with her!

[*Temple guards approach* THEKLA. *As they are on the point of leading her off, Right,* EZRA, DEMAS *and* HERMOGENES *enter, Left, followed by some of the mob.*]

EZRA. [*Addressing* ALEXANDER.] No more seeds of discontent will that miscreant sow in our synagogues.

ALEXANDER. You made an end of him?

DEMAS. This time, the renegade is surely dead.

HERMOGENES. Blaspheming Paul has yielded up his life to God.

THEKLA. [*Overhearing, turns.*] Paul—dead? No, no!

EZRA. [*Seeing* THEKLA.] Look you—his mistress!

ALEXANDER. Ho, ho! Guessed I not right, she was a drab?

DEMAS. Aye, naughty daughter of an honored name, that son of Satan for whom you did desert the noble young Thamyris lifeless lies outside the walls of Antioch—his body pulped under a shower of our stones.

THEKLA. [*As if invoking a benediction.*] May he sleep well in the bosom of the Lord! [*Addressing* ALEXANDER.] Now, let me meet your sentence without loss of time, archpriest of Jupiter, that speedily I may join Master Paul in the better world, where there is neither pain nor woe, but only joy and light and gladness.

ALEXANDER. That you shall.

[*On signal from* ALEXANDER, *temple guards bear* THEKLA *away, back Right. The mob follows, cheering madly.*]

VOICES. The arena—to the arena!

[*All troop off.*]

END OF SCENE FIVE

CURTAIN

SCENE VI

THE WISEMAN. [*Before the curtain.*]

Never was a Roman holiday complete
Without a human sacrifice, to slake the mob.
Hence we are about to look upon
Such a spectacle in Antioch's arena.

It is late afternoon, of the same day,
As jostling crowds the circus fill—
Men and women, dignitaries and populace—
To gloat over a soul in torment
And its tortures to enjoy.

Believing Paul gone on ahead
To his reward, Thekla gladly faced
Travailing for the greater growth.
To her the fiery death meant nothing
But a trial of faith.
Having learned from Master Paul
Not to cherish the things which are seen,
But the things which are not seen,
She welcomed stake, faggots and the flames.
For things that are seen are but for a day;
While the things that are not seen—
They abide through the ages.

Such confidence is its own deliverer,
As what follows shall reveal.

SCENE SIX

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

A CENTURION.
A GREEK.
A ROMAN.
MARCUS.
PHILEMON, *a friend of Thamyris.*
THAMYRIS.
LEPIDUS.
THEKLA.
TRYPHAENA, *a woman of Antioch.*
BURRIO.
FLACCUS, *the Roman governor of Antioch.*
ALEXANDER.
DEMAS.
HERMOGENES.
EZRA.
CYRUS.

Faggot bearers, Temple guards, Roman soldiers, Holiday crowd, Etc.

SCENE: *The interior of Antioch's open-air theatre, a semi-circular stone structure, with tier upon tier of benches rising, one above the other. The lower range is divided into stall-like sections, the center being gaily decorated for the Governor. The sky is just visible above the top row. The arena stretches out in the foreground. At the Left stands a masonry platform, with an iron stake.*

As the curtain rises, many of the Greeks, Romans and Pisidians, lately seen in the revel before Jupiter's temple, are crowding into the amphitheatre. There is much confusion in the wild scramble for seats. From time to time, distinguished-looking groups, entering the stalls, receive ovations from the populace. Attendants scurry about the arena; while faggot-bearers pile up fuel about the platform.

It is afternoon of the same day, as the last episode.

CENTURION. [*To the jostling crowd.*] Order, order, there!

A GREEK. [*Who is corpulent.*] He is squeezing me. [*Indicating a Roman next to him.*]

THE ROMAN. Because you're spreading out over two seats.

THE GREEK. Well, am I to blame for the gods having prospered me?

CENTURION. Quiet—both of you!

[*Trumpet sounds, off Right.*]

VOICES. Look—here they come!

[*All arise and cheer, until they see it is merely a detachment of soldiers, entering Right.*]

THE GREEK. Going to be made warm for some poor devil.

MARCUS. Devil-ess, friend. A woman, today!

[*Coarse laughter from the populace greets this gibe.* PHILEMON *and* THAMYRIS *enter the stall, to the Right of the Governor's. The crowd cheers* PHILEMON, *a young Greek of commanding presence.*]

PHILEMON. [*Gazing around, acknowledges the cheers.*] A happy throng that honors Jove.

THAMYRIS. [*Sitting down.*] What's the program?

PHILEMON. Some female to be burned, I'm told.

THAMYRIS. What for?

PHILEMON. For affronting the high-priest of Jupiter, in public.

THAMYRIS. Certain it is the women are growing over-bold, these days.

PHILEMON. [*Lightly.*] No more than usual, Thamyris. They have always been the more daring sex, though we have chosen to regard them as the weaker.

THAMYRIS. [*Sighing reminiscently.*] Perhaps you're right.

PHILEMON. But tell me, cousin, what brings you to Antioch?

THAMYRIS. A woman.

PHILEMON. [*Jabbing him playfully.*] Man-like, ever pleasure-questing! Yet I thought you safely stowed.

THAMYRIS. [*Sadly.*] I seek her who was my betrothed.

PHILEMON. You don't mean—she ran away? [THAMYRIS *nods.*] The ungrateful vixen!

THAMYRIS. A scoundrelly faker bewitched her. I had him whipped out of Iconium, hoping thereby to break his spell. But one day, while unobserved, she escaped and has been missing ever since. I have tried to forget her, Philemon, but it seems impossible.

PHILEMON. You still covet her?

THAMYRIS. More than that—I love her. Through countless cities have I traced the varlet who seduced her. Could I but find him, I am sure she will be there too. And when I do, his life shall pay.

PHILEMON. Count on me to help, Thamyris. [*They shake hands.*] Who was the wretch?

THAMYRIS. A renegade Jew, who has been driven from every place east of Antioch, for making trouble. They call him Paul.

PHILEMON. Paul? Why, a fellow of some such name was set upon here with stones, this very morning, for impersonating one of the gods. [*Addressing* MARCUS, *seated behind him.*] I say: wasn't he called Paul?

MARCUS. Aye, and they cast him outside the city walls—dead.

THAMYRIS. Paul dead? Praise be to Zeus! Then is his spell over Thekla broken, at last; and she is surely here in An-

tioch. [*Jumping up.*] I must find her, Philemon. No time for sport now, until these arms encircle her once more.

PHILEMON. [*Restraining him.*] But wait! The gods having granted your rival's death, remain and prove your gratitude by honoring them!

[*Becoming impatient, the crowd howls and applauds for the festivities to begin.*]

VOICES. Bring on the strumpet! Aye, bring her on!

THAMYRIS. I must go—I must.

[*Following a trumpet-flourish,* THEKLA *is led in from the Right, surrounded by temple guards in charge of* LEPIDUS. *A veil conceals her face. The crowd yells as if mad.*]

PHILEMON. [*Holding* THAMYRIS *back.*] You can't leave now. See—the victim! [THAMYRIS *protests, but* PHILEMON *prevents his departure.*]

VOICES. The jade! Vile woman!! Hell cat!!!

[*Temple guards escort* THEKLA *to the platform, where they bind her to the iron stake. While the men seem greatly amused, disapproval is uttered by women in the crowd, led by* TRYPHAENA, *a militant Roman matron.*]

TRYPHAENA. [*Arising in her place, halfway up Right.*] For-shame, that one of our sisters should have to pay such a penalty, because she defended her honor against a rotten priesthood.

BURRIO. [*Sitting nearby.*] Her honor? All there's left of that virtue, we men possess.

[*Amid the guffaws that follow,* FLACCUS, *the Roman governor, enters his stall, Center, trailed by* ALEXANDER, *the high priest, and other dignitaries.* FLACCUS *is an imposing figure. All stand and cheer loudly.*]

FLACCUS. [*Bowing right and left.*] Caesar's greetings to you, people of Antioch, and mine too.

[*As* FLACCUS *sits, others all follow suit.*]

ALEXANDER. [*Angrily.*] The sacrificial fire not yet kindled? Mighty Jove's patience hardly lasts forever.

FLACCUS. [*Addressing* LEPIDUS.] Why the delay?

LEPIDUS. We waited your entrance, Most Serene.

FLACCUS. Strip off the hussy's veiling; and let her nakedness be exposed.

VOICES. [*Riotously wild.*] Strip her—aye, expose her!

ALEXANDER. [*Vindictively, leaning far across the railing.*] Pile high the faggots, Lepidus, and apply the torch!

[*Faggot bearers now stack fuel all around* THEKLA. *At a signal from* LEPIDUS, *a guard tears off the veil, revealing her face. Recognizing her instantly,* THAMYRIS *leaps into the arena and prevents her further denudation. The crowd arises as one, with tumultuous outcry.*]

THAMYRIS. [*Hurling the guard half across the arena, mounts the platform.*] Thekla!

THEKLA. You—here, Thamyris?

[*As* THAMYRIS *would embrace her, guards led by* LEPIDUS *seize him.*]

PHILEMON. [*Frantically.*] Thamyris, are you mad?

DEMAS. [*Seated, Left.*] See, the noble young Iconian!

HERMOGENES. [*Beside* DEMAS.] What a coincidence that he should be here—this day and hour.

[*Vainly the soldiers try to quell the crowd which is now in an uproar.*]

ALEXANDER. [*Irately.*] An unspeakable outrage, this interruption, oh Governor!

FLACCUS. Bring the madman here! [*Indicating* THAMYRIS.] How dare you interfere in great Jupiter's ceremonial?

THAMYRIS. [*Before the Governor.*] Your pardon, most noble Flaccus, but this unhappy maiden you are about to give to the flames—

ALEXANDER. [*Breaking in.*] No maiden—she!

THAMYRIS. [*Going right on.*]—is the Lady Thekla, daughter of one of Iconium's foremost families and my betrothed.

FLACCUS. Not possible!

THAMYRIS. In search of her I came to Antioch, this day, as I have just related to yonder Philemon.

PHILEMON. So he has, most excellent Flaccus.

THAMYRIS. Yet did I not expect to find her in such distress, oh Governor. What she has done to deserve this fate, I know not.

ALEXANDER. [*Hotly.*] Me she spurned in public and derided, when I offered to befriend her, seeing she was alone and unprotected.

THEKLA. May God forgive your falsehood.

THAMYRIS. [*Addressing* ALEXANDER, *tactfully.*] Judge not too harshly of the damsel, oh priest of Jove! For these many days, she has been laboring under a sore bewitchment, put upon her by a sorcerer named Paul. But the spell is broken now, for I have just heard that his body lies outside your walls—dead.

EZRA. [*Seated, Left.*] By Sampson's mighty shoulders—the fiend is surely done for.

THEKLA. [*Rapturously affirming.*] There is no death—only the awakening from this earth-drowse into the Father's life eternal.

[*While* FLACCUS, ALEXANDER, THAMYRIS *and* PHILEMON *are consulting,* CYRUS *disguised as a faggot bearer gains entrance to the arena and approaches the platform.*]

CYRUS. [*Addressing* THEKLA.] Unto you the Christ's sweet peace, gentle lady.

THEKLA. And who are you?

CYRUS. One who believes in the Healer of Souls, Anointed in Godhood, come from Master Paul, to tell you that he lives.

THEKLA. Then he is not dead. I knew it—I knew it. [*Securely bound to the stake, she can only express her great joy by means of her eyes and voice.*]

CYRUS. While the disciples stood by and mourned over his prostrate body, like earth-crushed Truth Paul arose.

THEKLA. Ever near is our merciful God.

CYRUS. Hearing of your predicament, the Master sent me to bid you, gentle Thekla, not to lose faith in Him who prevents all harm.

THEKLA. The Lord knows I am unwavering.

LEPIDUS. [*Seeing* CYRUS *talk to* THEKLA.] Away—you!

CYRUS. [*To* THEKLA.] You shall see Paul again. [*Departs Right, as* THEKLA *smiles confidently.*]

FLACCUS. [*Addressing* THAMYRIS.] Though her transgression be grievous, if the damsel will consent to wed you, here and now, upon the plea of our good friend Philemon, she shall be spared.

ALEXANDER. But I protest—

THAMYRIS. [*Bounding across the arena to the platform.*] You heard the noble Governor, Thekla. Rejoice and come with me!

THEKLA. I cannot.

THAMYRIS. That other one is dead. I will forgive all and forget.

THEKLA. But not Thekla!

FLACCUS. What says the maiden?

ALEXANDER. [*Noting* THAMYRIS' *hesitation.*] She refuses.

THAMYRIS. [*In agonized cry.*] Thekla, Thekla—

FLACCUS. [*Addressing* THEKLA.] You refuse?

THEKLA. I do.

FLACCUS. The torch then!

VOICES. The torch! Let her burn! Ho, for the fireworks!

THAMYRIS. [*Charging about wildly.*] No, no, Governor!

FLACCUS. We'll soon see if flames do not melt the headstrong trollop.

ALEXANDER. [*Snorting grimly.*] That baggage? Huh!

[*As a temple guard approaches with a flaming torch,* THAMYRIS *leaps on platform to protect* THEKLA.]

FLACCUS. Away with him!

[*Aided by several guards,* LEPIDUS *pulls* THAMYRIS *down. He struggles like a madman as they drag him off, Right, calling to* THEKLA *as he goes.*]

PHILEMON. [*Vaulting into the arena.*] Thamyris, Thamyris! [*Runs after him, off Right.*]

ALEXANDER. Off with her clothes and let her sizzle!

FLACCUS. Quick now—apply the torch!

TRYPHAENA. [*As guards proceed to denude* THEKLA.] Shame, shame, oh men of Antioch, to mistreat one of the mother-sex so cruelly!

[*Women in all parts of the amphitheatre take up the cry of* "Shame, shame!" *while the men howl derisively.*]

ALEXANDER. What a pity to give such beauty to the flames —were they not great Jupiter's.

[THEKLA *does not wince, as the fire creeps up. Clouds of smoke hide her nakedness.*]

THEKLA. Lord God of Truth, I believe—I believe.

ALEXANDER. [*Gesticulating wildly.*] More faggots—make the fire hotter!

TRYPHAENA. [*As attendants obey.*] How monstrous are the judgments of this wicked city, oh ye gods.

[*At a signal from* TRYPHAENA, *women begin to crowd forward from all parts of the amphitheatre, in the direction of the Governor's stall. A general uproar ensues.*]

VOICES. [*Of the stampeding women.*] For this woe, may Antioch be destroyed!

FLACCUS. Silence, you—and order!

TRYPHAENA. [*Just outside* FLACCUS' *stall.*] Slay us all, oh Governor. For this crime, the whole city is certain to suffer.

[*The women echo approval, as the soldiers make vain efforts to force them back into their places. They leap over the railing, into the arena, like infuriated animals.*]

VOICES. [*Of the women.*] Oh, unjust judgment—cruel sight!

[*As if in response to the women's demand for the destruction of Antioch, darkness comes on suddenly followed by a storm of thunder and lightning.*]

THEKLA. [*As the flames shoot up.*] God is my defence. None other help is there.

FLACCUS. [*Becoming alarmed.*] See—destruction is upon us!

ALEXANDER. [*Revealing the coward that he is.*] Mercy, omnipotent Jove—mercy!

VOICES. [*Of men huddling together in fear.*] Spare us, mighty Olympian—have mercy!

TRYPHAENA. [*Addressing* FLACCUS, *as the women exult.*] See now, libertine, with whom the gods side!

[*Rain falls, putting out the fire. Her cords having burned,* THEKLA *is free to leave the platform. As she does, the women tear off their clothing and put it on her, the while they sing and dance for joy at her deliverance.*]

THEKLA. [*Kneeling.*] I thank thee, Father, that thou hast heard me. I knew that Thou hearest me always.

FLACCUS. [*Addressing* THEKLA, *as the storm abates.*] Woman, who are you?

THEKLA. I am a servant of the Living God, and a believer in Jesus Christ, His Son.

EZRA. By the wrath of Zerubbabel, will that blasphemy never down?

DEMAS. After witnessing this deliverance, I begin to fear not.

EZRA. [*Turning on* DEMAS *angrily.*] You—too? [*Dashes off, Left.*]

THEKLA. [*Addressing* FLACCUS.] That God I worship is a refuge to all who are in distress, a support to the afflicted, and the hope of them that are hopeless.

FLACCUS. Whoever that God is, this day He has worsted great Jove.

ALEXANDER. The witch seems to be turning your brain, too. Beware, oh Flaccus, lest Caesar hear of it!

THEKLA. May the same God Who clothed me when I was naked among the flames, in the day of judgment deck your souls in robes of redemption.

FLACCUS. I release you, Lady Thekla.

THEKLA. That my Lord and Master has already done.

TRYPHAENA. There is but one God, the God of Thekla—the God who has delivered her. He too will deliver all of us.

[*While the women circle around* THEKLA *in joyous song, she kneels humbly and prays. They follow her example. The storm being over, the men's courage returns. They depart, off Right, hooting and howling under the leadership of sneering Alexander, followed by* FLACCUS *and the soldiers.*]

CYRUS. [*Emerging from the crowd, approaches* THEKLA.] Master Paul awaits you.

THEKLA. [*Arising.*] Then God has heard my inmost prayer.

CYRUS. Come!

[THEKLA *follows* CYRUS *off, Left, as the women cheer.*]

END OF SCENE SIX

CURTAIN

THE WISEMAN. [*Before the curtain.*]

Another year goes by—for Paul a busy one.
Tireless in the service of Our Lord,
He bears His Tidings, far and near.
At last comes recognition from the saints,
For at a council in Jerusalem,
Peter, James and John, the Christly three,
Extended their right hands in fellowship
To Paul and bade him be about The Father's work.

With Timothy and Silas, he visited the flocks
Already sown in Lystra, Derbe and elsewhere.
But when Paul wished to preach the Word in Asia,
The Holy Ghost said—"No!"
Mysia skirting, he came to Troas.
Here was historic ground . . . .
Nearby the plains of Troy where, centuries before,
A gallant war was waged for lovely Helen.
Westward rolled the Aegean's waves
That lapped the shores of Greece and Rome,
And other lands Paul longed to win.
Yet knew he not which way to turn,
Seemingly estopped. But even then,
God had a mighty work for him—
Mightier, man was never called to do.

From over the deep came the physician, Luke;
And in the night, a vision appeared.
Paul had his orders, and he lost no time.
That was a moment of profoundest import,
Marking as it did the birth of a new era
And the death of Europe's pagan age.
Now must the ancient mythic gods give way;
For to replace them Paul took
The One True God of Jesus Christ,
Thus making Christianity, though of the East,
The all-powerful redemption of the West.

SCENE SEVEN

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

JASON, LINUS } *Greek sailors.*
PAUL.
SILAS, TIMOTHY } *companions of Paul.*
LUKE, *the physician.*
THEKLA.
CYRUS.
A MACEDONIAN, *who appears in a vision.*

SCENE: *The harbor of Troas, on the shores of the Aegean Sea, across which lies Europe—land of the Gentiles. At the Left is a gently sloping hillside, whereon stand a few stately, classic columns, dating from the Homeric era, a thousand years earlier. The town of Troas is some distance, off to the Right. The foreground consists of a rocky stretch, extending to the water's edge, back.*

As the curtain rises, it is the hour of sundown. The gathering dusk rapidly deepens into darkness. JASON *and* LINUS, *Greek sailors, are discovered in the act of beaching a small ship, back Right.*

JASON. We'll tie up here, for the night. [*Makes the boat fast.*]

LINUS. And then on to Troas?

JASON. Aye. There we may pick up some passengers who want to cross over to Macedonia, in the morning.

[JASON *and* LINUS *depart, off Right. A moment later,* PAUL, SILAS *and* TIMOTHY *enter, Left. The latter two come down the hillside.* SILAS *is an elderly man, while* TIMOTHY *is youthful. Having traveled far, they are weary.*]

TIMOTHY. Now we can rest, Master.

PAUL. [*Pausing on the hilltop.*] Yes, my son; and you too, good Silas.

SILAS. God willing. But how about you, Paul?

PAUL. [*Surveying the surroundings.*] On such classic ground as this, I cannot rest; for yonder are "the ringing plains of windy Troy," where a thousand years ago the heroes blind Homer immortalized had so often "drunk delight of battle with their peers." Know you aught of these things, Timothy?

TIMOTHY. No, Master.

PAUL. [*With a sigh of regret.*] What you have missed! Well do I remember my old Greek teacher, when a boy in Tarsus. How fervently he recited the resonant measures of The Iliad, telling of panoplied warriors and brightly harnessed steeds. Verily, had I not become a priest of God, a soldier's life would have been the life for me.

SILAS. But you are enlisted, Paul—in the army of our Lord; and you endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Surely, you have no regrets.

PAUL. Not a single one, Brother Silas. Yet, however willing one's spirit, there are always moments when the flesh is weak.

TIMOTHY. [*Approaching* PAUL.] Come, Master, today's long trudge over Mount Ida has wearied you. Lie down and forget this self-reproach. There is no occasion for it.

PAUL. Little you know Paul, my boy, who is the chief of sinners. Wherefore God gives me no peace.

SILAS. Unto yourself, Paul, you are most unjust.

PAUL. [*Coming forward.*] The Holy Spirit which, hitherto, guided me on this journey, has forbidden our continuing on and preaching in the famous old cities of farther Asia, whence I have always yearned to carry the Word.

SILAS. Only patience, brother! Even now, God may have something more important in store for you. All too often providential ways are past human understanding.

[*Preparing a place for himself, Right,* TIMOTHY *lies down.*]

PAUL. When lately we reached Mysia and wanted to go to Bithynia, the Spirit of Jesus suffered us not to. How I must have displeased God; for verily, I know not which way now to turn.

TIMOTHY. [*Jumping up, embraces* PAUL.] Cast thy burden on the Lord, Master. He will sustain thee. Be not downhearted! God's boundless love never yet failed to meet any human need. Come, let us spend the night in prayer. By morning, you will have an answer.

PAUL. [*Returning* TIMOTHY'S *embrace.*] Your great faith, Timothy, gives me renewed strength. Bear with me, the both of you good brethren.

SILAS. Of course we will.

PAUL. [*Sitting on a stone, Left.*] This day, the thorn of mine infirmity seems to have been driven deeper into the flesh, lest once more I become proud and overweening.

TIMOTHY. No danger of that, Master.

PAUL. Well, here we will tarry for the night and then, early in the morning, enter Troas to seek employment. As a tentmaker, I can always find work.

SILAS. But surely, there are brethren who will shelter us, a while.

PAUL. Aye, Silas, and gladly. Yet it is the duty of each man to maintain an honorable independence. God enjoins that.

[*While the three have been talking,* LUKE *enters, back Right. He is a large man, of professional mien and well groomed.*]

LUKE. Greetings!

PAUL. [*As all turn.*] Welcome to you, sir, and peace!

LUKE. [*Approaching nearer.*] Traveling?

TIMOTHY. Aye. And you?

LUKE. The same. If not too bold, may I ask your goal?

SILAS. We have none, as yet.

LUKE. Out for pleasure then—seeing the country, as we say. [*Laughs in a friendly manner.*]

PAUL. Hardly that. Though we do take the road for pleasure, yet is it not our own.

LUKE. Whose then, pray tell?

PAUL. The Lord's—our dear Lord's pleasure! Here we await His further instruction, concerning it.

LUKE. He comes this way?

PAUL. Before going into more detail, my friend, may we not first have some knowledge of yourself?

[*It is dark now. The moon which appeared, descends slowly.*]

LUKE. [*In a frank, cordial manner.*] Gladly. I am called Luke, the physician.

TIMOTHY. A physician. Then you prescribe for men's bodies.

LUKE. Aye. And, if I might offer a suggestion, from what I have observed of your leader here [*Indicating* PAUL.] I should say he would be benefitted by the sloughed skins of salamanders.

PAUL. Your physic would do my poor body no good, friend Luke. Therefore, why waste thought upon it? Only God, the great Physician of the Soul, can help me.

LUKE. God help your body?

SILAS. Surely. Why not?

LUKE. [*Laughing good naturedly.*] A novel doctrine that! One which ought to prosper in my country, where each new fad and fancy finds ready adherents.

TIMOTHY. Which is your country?

LUKE. Macedonia, across yonder sea, in what is called Europe.

PAUL. Rome is somewhere thereabouts.

LUKE. Aye, beyond Athens—in Italy.

PAUL. I must see Rome. And there are Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus and many other great cities. [LUKE *nods.*] How I yearn to preach His Word among them, if only our dear Lord would send me there.

LUKE. Who is this Lord you serve so loyally?

PAUL. The one and everlasting God, who alone can save mankind from sin, sickness and death.

LUKE. Is there such a God?

PAUL. Assuredly! And Him have we preached all the way from Jerusalem to here. Even now, we await his direction whither to turn next.

LUKE. Why not come with me to Macedonia, in the morning? What you say interests me. I would learn more.

TIMOTHY. Are many people, yonder?

LUKE. Aye, and well learned too.

SILAS. But only in worldly ways, if they know not the one true God.

LUKE. As a student of medicine and the natural sciences, I have never given the superstition of religion much thought. But now you say your God can save from sickness and death, as a physician that arouses my curiosity.

PAUL. His Son, Jesus the Christ, healed every known disease.

LUKE. His formulas must have been many.

PAUL. He had but one.

LUKE. Only one? What was it?

PAUL. Truth!

LUKE. [*With a sneer of superior wisdom.*] But that isn't a material remedy—one to be administered.

PAUL. Indeed not! It is wisdom—the only real intelligence. "Ye shall know the Truth," the great Healer declared, "and the Truth shall make you free."

TIMOTHY. [*Adding, with enthusiasm.*] Aye! And knowledge of the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

LUKE. How may one obtain this remarkable cure-all?

PAUL. By faith.

LUKE. Faith in what?

PAUL. [*With earnestness and deliberation.*] In God, Luke. Not blind belief, mind you, but an enlightened understanding of Him. For such faith is the substance of things hoped for —the evidence of things not seen.

LUKE. [*Shaking his head incredulously.*] You mean to tell me that there is substance—reality—in things not seen?

PAUL. Aye! We look not at the things which are seen, my friend, but rather at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal; while the things which are not seen—they are eternal.

LUKE. A most amazing doctrine.

SILAS. Yet none more true, in all the world.

LUKE. And what about death?

PAUL. Christ Jesus overcame that also, in the resurrection.

LUKE. You mean to say He arose from the bier, once He was laid out?

PAUL. There were many eye-witnesses to His triumph, over this last human enemy.

LUKE. Scarce am I able to believe all that you say. However, I am eager to go deeper into these mysteries. Wherefore, if you cannot visit Macedonia, may I accompany you and observe?

PAUL. Come along! [PAUL *and* LUKE *shake hands in token of their new-found friendship.*]

SILAS. [*Addressing* PAUL.] Let us rest a few hours now, Master, ere the morning breaks.

PAUL. Quite right, Brother Silas. [*Turns to* TIMOTHY.] And you, beloved Timothy, repeat aloud our dear Lord's precious prayer!

[*All kneel in prayer, save* LUKE *who looks on.*]

TIMOTHY. [*In a voice that vibrates reverently.*] "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever."

OMNES. [*Except* LUKE.] Amen!

PAUL. [*Going Left, lies down, apart from the others.*] God rest you all well.

SILAS. And you too, Master.

TIMOTHY. Blessings and everlasting peace!

LUKE. Good night, my friends.

[SILAS *lies down near* PAUL. *They go to sleep, almost instantly.* TIMOTHY *and* LUKE *stretch out, down Right.*]

TIMOTHY. A goodly place, this.

LUKE. [*Indicating* PAUL.] Who is your leader?

TIMOTHY. Paul, the great Apostle, verily a holy man; for unto him God's only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, appeared and bade him carry the healing Gospel unto all Gentiles.

LUKE. They have need of healing. I know, because there is much quackery practiced among them.

TIMOTHY. Aye.

LUKE. [*Composing himself.*] You give me wonderful things to think on.

TIMOTHY. The most wonderful in all the wide, wide world. [*Turns over on his side.*]

[*All are now asleep. A solitary figure appears over the hill, Left*—THEKLA *in masculine garb. Seeing the sleepers, she frightens.* CYRUS *appears and the two descend.* PAUL *turns in his sleep, exposing his face*]

THEKLA. It is he, Cyrus—he! [*She is deeply moved.*]

CYRUS. Master Paul?

THEKLA. Aye, Paul, at last. [*As* CYRUS *draws near.*] Sh-h-h, do not waken him. He must be very tired. Praise God, and let us sleep here, too.

[*After kneeling in prayer briefly,* THEKLA *lies down near* PAUL*; and* CYRUS *a little farther away. Both drop off, at once. The moon having disappeared into the sea, an inky blackness envelops all. Out of it sounds a sonorous call*:]

MACEDONIAN. Paul—Paul.

[PAUL *sits up instantly and rubs his eyes. Over the sea flashes an extremely bright light, in the midst of which appears a Man of Macedonia who seems to be standing on the distant shore.*]

MACEDONIAN. Come over into Macedonia and help us, Paul!

PAUL. [*Jumping up.*] As thou sayest, Lord. [*Going among the sleepers, as the vision fades.*] Timothy, Silas—wake up! Arise and glorify God!

TIMOTHY. [*Arising.*] Yes, Master—

SILAS. [*Breaking in.*] What is it, Paul?

[*Day begins to dawn. All gather around* PAUL, *down stage, including* LUKE.]

PAUL. This day we go to Macedonia. All my doubts have cleared away.

LUKE. You cross over?

PAUL. Aye, the Lord has just sent one of your countrymen, who asked me to bring help.

TIMOTHY. Said I not He would direct us?

SILAS. Man may be distant; but God is always near.

PAUL. There is no time to lose. We must be off, at once.

LUKE. [*Looking around.*] There is a ship, but no sailors.

PAUL. Go into Troas, Timothy, and find them!

TIMOTHY. [*As he goes.*] Look you, a sleeper who was not here when we lay down. [*Indicating* THEKLA.]

SILAS. And here's another. [*Indicating* CYRUS.]

PAUL. Let them sleep. Only make haste and find the seamen!

LUKE. Knowing all the sailor-haunts in Troas, I had better go along.

[TIMOTHY, SILAS *and* LUKE *depart, back Right.* PAUL *goes to the water's edge, where he pauses to gaze far off across the sea.*]

PAUL. The day is short, the work abundant; the laborers are remiss. Yet the reward is great and the Master presses. Strengthen me, oh Lord, to scatter Thy light in yonder distant lands. What portent moment this! Greece and Rome have sent forth their legions to destroy and desolate the East. In requital, may we—returning evil with good, as God's Lamb enjoined us to do—now go over there as messengers of peace and proclaim to all that live beyond the Gospel's invigorating Truth.

THEKLA. [*Awaking with a start.*] Master—Master Paul!

PAUL. [*Turning.*] Who calls?

THEKLA. [*Seeing him.*] Oh, I feared you had gone again.

PAUL. [*Approaching her.*] Who are you, boy, that you know me?

THEKLA. No boy, Master. Look close! [*He does.*] Surely, you have not forgotten me—so soon.

PAUL. I recognize in you one of God's beloved children.

THEKLA. [*Plainly disappointed.*] Is that all?

PAUL. What truer recognition can there be, than that real self you have revealed to me?

THEKLA. I am Thekla.

PAUL. Thekla? [*Coming closer, scans her face.*] So you are. Let God be praised.

THEKLA. You are glad to see me again, Master Paul?

PAUL. Indeed. Most glad to know you have been delivered and are faithful still.

THEKLA. Ever faithful, Master—to you.

PAUL. [*Retreating a step.*] When came you here?

THEKLA. Early this morning I arrived, with Cyrus who sleeps yonder.

PAUL. You are married?

THEKLA. [*Startles.*] Oh no, Master Paul! Cyrus is he who brought the good news that you were not really dead, which renewed my desire to live, when I was about to be burned in the arena at Antioch. That was a year ago. He has been a loyal servant, ever since. On being freed by God's intercession, we set out together, to find you, dear Paul, and have hardly rested from that moment until now.

PAUL. Aye, but Thekla—

THEKLA. [*Going right on.*] Many times have we been right behind you—on your very heels—but never seemed quite able to catch up. Trailing you across the farther eastlands, oh Paul, I would have continued to the very ends of the world, until I found you.

PAUL. But tell me: how came you to adopt such garb?

THEKLA. Because journeying as a man is much more safe. [PAUL *shakes his head dubiously.*] Now that we have met again, beloved Master, if you are pleased, I will follow wherever you may lead.

PAUL. You know not what you say, my child.

THEKLA. [*With some passion.*] Call me not child. I would be more to you, dear Paul, your—

[*With this unbaring of her heart,* THEKLA *becomes worked up to a high emotional pitch. Suddenly her hair is unloosed, streaming down around her shoulders. Simultaneously, her girdle gives way, permitting the garb she wears to assume a feminine aspect.*]

PAUL. [*Checking her further confession.*] No, no, Thekla! You could not then be the Lord's bride. For, did you not

say, that night you first came to me in Iconium's prison, you could not marry your betrothed because of an all-consuming desire to preserve yourself unspotted for Him whose infinite love surpasses knowledge?

THEKLA. I did, Master. But ever since, the longing of my heart has steadily increased for you.

PAUL. [*Shaking his head sadly.*] Far better such increase for Him I serve.

THEKLA. [*With an agonized cry.*] Oh, why?

PAUL. Sister in Christ, most earnestly do I strive to put off the old man with his deeds of the world worldly. Wherefore I have always said to the widows and unmarried that it is good for them to abide—even as I.

THEKLA. [*Bravely, though hard hit.*] As you say, Master Paul. Not my will, but Thine be done!

PAUL. Verily, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.

THEKLA. Just to be near, may I not follow you?

PAUL. Nor that, Thekla. Where I go, the people are given to evil ways. Being beautiful, there you would meet much temptation.

THEKLA. Only grant me the seal of Jesus Christ, Master, and no temptation shall affect me.

PAUL. Return to Iconium and, in the Father's name, you shall have it. Go hence and teach His word!

[CYRUS *having awakened, sits up and looks around in a dazed manner.*]

THEKLA. If it be God's will.

CYRUS. [*Approaching* PAUL.] Hail, Master Paul—your blessing!

PAUL. And you are—

CYRUS. [*Kneeling.*] Cyrus, the cripple that was, whom the Anointed Healer restored to wholeness through you, in Antioch.

PAUL. I well remember it, praise God. [*Helping him up.*] And now, good Cyrus, return home with Thekla, there to bear testimony unto the Lord, our King.

THEKLA. Then you will not take me along?

PAUL. I cannot, daughter.

[TIMOTHY, SILAS *and* LUKE *return, back Right, followed by the sailors,* JASON *and* LINUS, *who stop at the ship and prepare to set sail.*]

TIMOTHY. Here are the seamen, Master. [*Seeing* THEKLA.] Oh, pardon!

PAUL. This is the faithful Thekla, of Iconium.

SILAS. She, whom you have often told us the Lord delivered from the flames?

PAUL. The same.

TIMOTHY. [*To* THEKLA.] Welcome, Lady! [*Turning to* PAUL.] Would she also accompany us, to Macedonia?

THEKLA. [*Eagerly.*] Oh, yes—

PAUL. [*Interrupting.*] Thekla returns home, there to do the Lord's work. Come, my brothers, having no time to lose, we must be off—for yonder lands, across the sea. [*Turning to* THEKLA.] Farewell, gentle sister! I will see you on my return. [*Approaches ship, followed by* TIMOTHY *and* SILAS.]

LUKE. [*As they embark.*] With this brisk wind, we should soon reach the other shore.

[*Two sailors push the ship into the water and jump aboard.*]

PAUL. [*Waving to* THEKLA.] May the Comforter be ever with you!

THEKLA. [*Also waving, from elevation Left.*] And with you too, dear Master Paul!

[THEKLA *struggles to control her emotions, as the ship disappears.* CYRUS, *at her side, pats* THEKLA *gently on the shoulder.*]

END OF SCENE SEVEN

SLOW CURTAIN

SCENE VIII

THE WISEMAN. [*Before the curtain.*]

Swiftly sped the tiny ship across the waters.
Paul and his companions went to Philippi,
Where Christ's first church in Europe grew.
Then, on to Thessalonica and Athens,
Crown of classic Grecian glory.
There, in the market-place, he did inveigh
Against the city's rank idolatry.
Facing the philosophers on Mars Hill,
Paul fearlessly denounced their superstition.
He told them of the human race's Oneness—
All men offspring of one God,
All the nations of one blood!
To them it was a new and startling thought;
To us, alas, a fact as yet unrealized.

Following missions in Corinth and Ephesus,
Paul yearned once more toward Rome imperial.
But no! Six years after the Aegean crossing,
Jerusalem called to him again. He went,
Though apprehensive of afflicting bonds.

One evening's play could never quite present
All that occurred in such a strenuous life.
Hence, the details are somewhat re-arranged
And their sequence, though the import is preserved;
It being our chief purpose to reveal
The molding of a character,
Inspired to do the will of God.

Back in the Holy City, before the Temple,
To which all Juda fanatical allegiance yields.
It is Paul's final visit. Knowledge that
His countrymen's hostility was keenest there
Made him the more eager to confront the brethren.
See now how a man of rarest courage
Dares to face the hatred of his kind!

SCENE EIGHT

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

LYSIAS, *chief of the Centurions.*
EZRA.
PAUL.
AGABUS.
LUKE.
JAMES.
TIMOTHY.
ANANIAS, *High Priest of the Temple.*
ABRAHAM.
CYRUS.
AARON.
ISAAC.
ELIAS.

Jewish populace, Roman soldiers, Temple guards, Etc.

SCENE: *An open space in front of the walls, surrounding the Temple built by Herod the Great, in Jerusalem. Over the top may be seen outlines of buildings inside—the Holy of Holies of the Jews. Back Right, a broad stairway of stone leads up to an opening in the wall, where there is a spacious landing, over which all persons must pass, going in or out of the Temple.*

The curtain's rise reveals a motley, jostling throng of excited Jews in heated conversation. As it is nearing the season of Pentecost, many of the "chosen people" have come to Jerusalem, from far and near, to participate in the annual feast. To prevent any uprising, Roman soldiers appear, from time to time, and scatter the crowds.

Six years have elapsed since the last episode.

LYSIAS. [*At the head of the Centurions.*] Disperse, ye—disperse!

EZRA. And why?

LYSIAS. Because I like not your humor.

EZRA. This is Jerusalem—our capital city.

VOICES. [*Of the Jews.*] Aye, aye—Jehovah's own—Zion!

LYSIAS. That makes no difference. I say—scatter!

[*With a flourish of his sword,* LYSIAS *charges the crowd, followed by the Centurions. Hooting and jeering as they go, the Jews flee, off Right. The soldiers follow them. When the space is clear,* PAUL *comes on, back Left, attended by* TIMOTHY, JAMES, AGABUS, LUKE *and four others.*]

PAUL. [*With deep admiration.*] The Temple! May God's peace ever enfold His holy citadel.

AGABUS. Aye, Brother Paul, peace! And had you not fared this way, its preservation would have been the more certain.

PAUL. Why so, good Agabus?

AGABUS. [*Taking* PAUL'S *girdle, binds him.*] Thus saith the Holy Spirit: "So will the Jews of Jerusalem bind him that owns this girdle, and hand him over to unfriendly Gentiles."

LUKE. We also warned him. [*To which* TIMOTHY *nods.*]

PAUL. I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem, for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

AGABUS. Beware, Paul, for this day shall surely try you!

[PAUL *searches the faces of* JAMES *and* AGABUS, *as if to make out what they are driving at.*]

JAMES. [*Addressing* PAUL.] In your most excellent work among the nations afar, dear brother, we rejoice. And for the alms you have brought, we are truly grateful.

TIMOTHY. Freely were they given—in His Name.

JAMES. [*To* PAUL.] Since your arrival, you have observed the many Jews here, who have adopted our Faith. Notwithstanding, all remain zealous upholders of the Law.

PAUL. For which, God's is the greater glory.

JAMES. [*As if feeling his way.*] Now, concerning you, Paul, they have been informed that you advocate forgetfulness of the ways of Moses.

PAUL. Aye, forgetfulness of the empty rites and customs! For true religion is not a matter of outward ceremony, but of the inner life. [*Some nod approval, but most of them shake their heads dubiously.*]

JAMES. A crowd is certain to assemble, for already it is noised about that you are here.

PAUL. Well, what of that?

JAMES. It is policy that we continue to combine our practice with Mosaic precept, for the time being. Therefore, to avoid trouble—do as we propose.

PAUL. And what do you propose?

JAMES. Go into the Temple at once, with these four brothers—[*Indicating quartette in the background.*]—and be purified with them. Then all the Jews—believers with us and otherwise—will see that there is no truth in these tales about you, since you do scrupulously observe the Law.

AGABUS. [*As* PAUL *hesitates.*] Do that, Brother Paul, for the love of God and the security of His church, here in Jerusalem.

PAUL. Very well, seeing no particular harm therein, I will oblige you. For, though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. For, is it not written: "In Jerusalem do ye even as the Jews do?" [*All nod enthusiastic approval.*]

JAMES. Go then, before you are discovered.

PAUL. As you wish, my brothers.

TIMOTHY. [*Accompanying* PAUL *to stairway, Right.*] May our Blessed Savior's grace ever fill you, Master.

[PAUL *mounts the stairs, followed by the four; arriving at the top, all disappear into the Temple enclosure.*]

JAMES. [*Apart, to* AGABUS.] Now, he will be unable to leave the sacred precincts of the upper court, at least during the most thronged period of this Pentecost, which makes us reasonably safe once more from the danger of attack.

AGABUS. The mischief-maker! If only he hadn't come—

LUKE. [*Interrupting, hotly.*] Paul is not a mischief-maker.

JAMES. You know not enough of his past, Brother Luke. Of our entire number today, Paul is most bitterly hated by the Jews. They blame him for the Nazarene's inroads on their dwindling ranks.

AGABUS. To them his presence is maddening as red to a bull.

TIMOTHY. Aye, because he is bold as a leopard, swift as an eagle, bounding as a stag and brave as a lion, to do the will of our Heavenly Father. Such an one will always excite the envy of error's bondmen.

[*They depart, off down Right, talking among themselves as they go. A moment later,* ANANIAS, *the venerably white-bearded High Priest of the Temple, enters Left, surrounded by a band of sinister looking Jews, armed with short daggers. Prominent among them are* EZRA *and* ABRAHAM.]

ABRAHAM. May the curse of Satan never be lifted from ourselves or our families, revered Ananias, if we eat one bite or drink a single drop before this plague of Israel measures the dust.

ANANIAS. [*With a cunning smile.*] For love of Jehovah, you are determined to kill the traitor Saul?

[CYRUS *enters cautiously, Left; overhears the threat of the conspirators.*]

VOICES. [*Of assassins around* ANANIAS, *as they brandish their daggers.*] Death to the apostate—betrayer of Israel!

[*Unobserved,* CYRUS *hastens out, as he came.*]

ANANIAS. May all despatch attend you then, in removing the blight of Juda. Succeed, and the coffers of the Sanhedrin, which he deceived, shall reward you!

EZRA. Only see to it, worshipful High Priest, that we get a good chance to strike him. For by the vitals of Jeremiah, the evil one whom he serves so grimly, guards his life well. A dozen times have I been near enough to fell him; yet, on each occasion, like the serpent that he is, the renegade has wriggled off.

ANANIAS. But not this time, I promise you.

[*From all sides, the Jewish populace begins to stream in. At the same time, from inside the Temple walls come riotous shouts. Immediately half-a-dozen Levites appear on the landing, led by* AARON, *dragging* PAUL.]

AARON. [*Hurling* PAUL *down the stairs.*] Out of the Temple with you—defile not its sacred precincts!

PAUL. [*Picking himself up, at the bottom.*] Men of Israel, my countrymen—help!

ANANIAS. [*Seeing* PAUL, *addresses the assassins.*] There's your victim, now. Make short work of him! [*Loses himself in the crowd.*]

AARON. See the recreant rabbi, men of Juda, who proclaims everywhere that Gentiles are as good as the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—who reviles the Law and befouls our Holy Temple by introducing uncircumcised Greeks into it.

ABRAHAM. The vile dog!

EZRA. [*Dashing at* PAUL.] At last, we have you, Snake-in-the-Grass Paul—minion of that false, Galilean, wine-bibbing prophet Jesus.

VOICES. [*Of Jewish populace, closing in on* PAUL *menac-*

ingly.] Kill the turncoat—seceder—impostor—heretic—Satanas—kill him!

PAUL. Only listen to me, ye men of Jerusalem—listen!

ABRAHAM. [*As the mob pauses for an instant.*] Listen, listen—already have we listened to you, far too long.

EZRA. [*To the mob.*] Smash him—stick him!

[*As the Jews descend on* PAUL, *the clang of Roman soldiers, approaching from Left, is heard.* CYRUS *enters on the run.*]

CYRUS. [*Calling, over his shoulder.*] To the rescue—quick! They're murdering him.

ABRAHAM. [*To the assassins.*] Make haste—the Romans!

CYRUS. [*Plunging into the mob.*] Paul, Paul—Master Paul!

[EZRA *shoves* CYRUS *aside, as the Centurions enter, Left, double quick time, led by* LYSIAS. *The mob falls back.*]

LYSIAS. Always rioting, you bearded hounds! Caesar shall hear of this and your yoke be made heavier. You seem never able to gather, without making trouble.

EZRA. It's this reprobate's fault. [*Indicating* PAUL.] He riles all Jewry.

LYSIAS. [*Scanning* PAUL.] Who is the man, and what has he done?

ABRAHAM. He's an infamous felon, who incenses our people by outraging God.

LYSIAS. [*Addressing* PAUL.] Are you not that Egyptian who lately stirred up several thousand cut-throats and led them into the desert, where we chopped the most of them to pieces?

VOICES. [*From the mob.*] Aye, aye—he's the fellow.

LYSIAS. [*To his men.*] Then bind him with chains, lest he escape again.

PAUL. [*As two Centurions make him secure.*] Nay, Tribune, I am a Jew of Tarsus, in Cilicia—a citizen of no mean city.

EZRA. No Jew he—but a traitor, an expatriate and a blasphemer! To prove to you what an undependable villain the wretch is: he now champions the vicious Nazarene dogma which once he swore utterly to destroy.

PAUL. [*Standing his ground.*] Give me leave, noble Lysias, to speak to these, my countrymen.

ABRAHAM. We'll not hear him.

EZRA. [*As the mob roars its disapproval of* PAUL.] Away with him! He's unfit for the sun to shine on.

LYSIAS. Silence, rabble!

PAUL. Only a moment's speech I crave.

LYSIAS. Proceed.

PAUL. [*Mounting the stairs.*] My brethren: a score of years ago, I was one of you, here in Jerusalem; wherefore I beseech you to listen to my defence.

[*To drown out* PAUL, *the Jews bawl and howl, tear their clothes, throw dust in the air and make a hideous commotion generally.*]

ABRAHAM. We refuse to hear it.

VOICES. Aye, aye, we will not hear him.

[*The soldiers move among the populace, once more restoring some semblance of order and silence.* ANANIAS *appears from the Temple enclosure, on the landing above* PAUL, *back Right.*]

PAUL. I have always discharged my duties before God, with a perfectly clear conscience.

ANANIAS. Liar! Smite him on the mouth, oh sons of Israel!

[*Several of the Jews lunge at* PAUL, *striking him in spite of the soldiers, who promptly repel them.*]

PAUL. [*Turning to* ANANIAS.] You whited wall, God will surely smite you, before long.

ANANIAS. [*Sputtering with rage.*] What, you dare—

PAUL. [*Going right on.*] You pretend to judge me according to the Law; and in violation of that same Law, you order me to be smitten.

EZRA. [*Crowding forward.*] You revile Israel's High Priest —you blackguard?

PAUL. He—the High Priest? [*Levelling forefinger at* ANANIAS.] Your pardon, brethren. I did not know.

VOICES. Falsifier—hypocrite—traducer!

PAUL. Men of Zion, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. It is because of my hope of a resurrection, that I am so denounced.

[*Emerging from the mob,* ISAAC *and* ELIAS *range themselves alongside of* PAUL.]

ISAAC. He's one of us.

ELIAS. It is no crime to be a Pharisee.

ANANIAS. Hear, you Sadducees, the heresy he utters. [*Indicating* PAUL.]

VOICES. Defamer—libeler!

[*The mob now splits into two factions. The Sadducees voice violent opposition to* PAUL; *while the Pharisees incline to give him a hearing.*]

OTHER VOICES. Hear—hear him!

PAUL. [*Temperately, yet full of feeling.*] Ye chosen people, there is no schism between what you reverence and that

which I declare; for through Isaiah, first of the great Hebrew prophets, God foretold the coming of the Lord Jesus and made it clear he would be a suffering Christ—despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief. Truly, that was the Nazarene, the virgin-born Son of God and Mary, as clean-blooded a Jew as you or I or any other scion of Israel, since Abraham. [*Cries of execration from outraged Sadducees in the mob.*] And, just as it was predicted, we hid our faces from Him and esteemed Him not. Nevertheless, He has borne our agony and carried our sorrows. For our transgressions He was wounded; and for our iniquities He was bruised. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.

LYSIAS. [*Fearing another outbreak, as the mob becomes more restive, addresses* PAUL.] Make haste, you!

PAUL. If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. So, when Messias finally came, you and your leaders —of whom I was one—having no eyes, we failed to recognize Him as Juda's long-promised Redeemer. But, happily for us, a few of our people still had spiritual vision, in that unhappy day.

ABRAHAM. God's chosen would have made Himself known to all of us.

PAUL. It is common knowledge that the Hebrew people have never been of one mind, concerning the details of our faith. Among us, as you all well know, there are Essenes, Sadducees, Pharisees and other groups. Yet, none denies their Jewish birthright, just because of a minor difference of belief. Wherefore, we followers of the gentle Nazarene are equally entitled to recognition as of Israel.

VOICES. [*Of Sadducees.*] No, no—never, never!

PAUL. [*Continues unmindful of the interruption.*] If you regard this newest sect as hostile to Jewry, you make a grievous mistake; for it really marks the logical culmination

of Judaism, whose finest ideals are fully realized therein. It was the conception of a Jew, fostered and developed by Jews, and intended for Jews—in company with all the rest of humanity; because the foremost of our Prophets said that the Lord Jesus was ordained for a light unto the Gentiles, and for the salvation of all the lands of the earth. Hence, oh men of Jerusalem, in what has come to be called Christianity, after the Christ—that is: the Anointed one of Holy Writ, which was none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the God-appointed Messiah and King, fulfiller of the Law and of the fondest expectations of our precious Jewish nation—there is nothing inimical or opposed to the traditional Judaism which all of you so profoundly revere. On the contrary, it is the very highest form thereof.

EZRA. [*Shaking his fist in* PAUL'S *face.*] Miserable besmircher of Jehovah!

ELIAS. We find no evil in what Paul declares.

ISAAC. If an angel has talked to him, let us not fight against God.

ABRAHAM. [*Hissing at the group of Pharisees surrounding* PAUL.] Blasphemers, all of you!

[*Led by* EZRA, *the Sadducees leap at* PAUL; *while the Pharisees attempt to hold them off.*]

PAUL. [*Calling to* LYSIAS.] Does the law of Caesar permit a Roman citizen—one who is uncondemned—to be thus meanly handled?

LYSIAS. You—a Roman citizen?

[*The mob pauses for an instant.*]

PAUL. I was free born.

EZRA. Perjurer!

[*As the two factions of the mob resume hostilities,* LYSIAS *becomes concerned for* PAUL'S *safety.*]

LYSIAS. [*Signalling to the Centurions.*] Protect this man, on pain of your lives!

[*The soldiers surround* PAUL.]

EZRA. His blood, his blood! All Rome shall not keep us from spilling it.

[*With difficulty, the soldiers prevent the frenzied Jews from reaching* PAUL.]

ANANIAS. Death to the villain!

LYSIAS. [*To a subaltern.*] Make ready an escort for immediate departure to Caesarea. This man must be sent away, lest he have all Jerusalem at our throats.

[*Saluting, the subaltern dashes off, Left.*]

CYRUS. [*Approaching* PAUL.] Thekla sends greetings, Master, and begs you to visit her grotto, near Seleucia.

PAUL. Tell her gladly, should I ever be delivered to freedom.

[CYRUS *disappears in the mob.*]

LYSIAS. Come, Man Paul, pluck up! You must help fight your way through this mob, or they will surely kill you.

PAUL. If God so wills, His will is mine.

LYSIAS. [*Brandishing his sword.*] Forward! Run the wretches through with your lances and cut their windpipes, if they do not clear the way.

[*The Romans force a passage through the fighting, howling mob, passing off Left, with* PAUL *in their midst. The tumult continues as the Jewish factions contend with one another.*]

END OF SCENE EIGHT

CURTAIN

THE WISEMAN. [*Before the curtain.*]

To preserve the Temple City's peace
Paul was escorted to Caesarea,
By a cohort of five hundred men.
Antonius Felix, Roman procurator—
Onetime slave, now profligate—
There heard the charges of the Jews
Against the valiant man of God,
And knew not what to make of them.

Two years long he kept him dangling;
Until from Nero, Festus came
And the vexing case inherited.
At once, the priestly hierarchy
Demanded the return of Paul
To Jerusalem for trial;
But Festus refused. He knew Paul of old,
Having traveled the Damascan Road with him,
A score of years before, on that great day,
When Christ appeared and Persecutor Saul
Faced right about—Paul the Believer to become.

Now enter we the audience-chamber,
A noble hall for pageantry and pomp,
Where Festus sits, in Caesarea.
Paul pleads again with eloquence.
To hear his story comes Agrippa,
Great grandson of Herod, the King,
Who built the Temple at Jerusalem
And the Infant Jesus sought to slay,
Hoping thereby prophecy to defeat.

But as time, events and circumstance unfold,
We see anew how God proceeds
Mysteriously His wonders to achieve!

SCENE NINE

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

FESTUS, *now Roman governor of Judea.*
PAUL.
ATTENDANT.
ANANIAS.
EZRA.
THAMYRIS, *also known as Julio.*
HEROD AGRIPPA, *King of the Jews.*

Roman soldiers, Attendants on Festus, Herod's retinue, Jews, Courtiers, Etc.

SCENE: *The Procurator's audience chamber in Caesarea, seat of the Roman government in Judea. It is a stately marble hall. Diagonally, back Left, stands a canopied tribunal. Benches and tables grouped right and left, for litigants and other functionaries.*

DISCOVERED: FESTUS *seated on the tribunal, in the act of hearing the charges against* PAUL, *preferred by* ANANIAS, EZRA, *and other Jews. It is a brilliant assemblage and one of striking contrasts.* FESTUS, *in his late fifties, is attired in scarlet. Military men in gleaming armor surround him, also civil authorities in furred gowns, and other distinguished persons in flowing robes. Against the calm, dignified Romans, the scowling faces, flashing eyes and screaming interruptions of the Jews stand out vividly.*

Two years have passed since the last scene.

FESTUS. [*Addressing* PAUL.] What was that you just said?

PAUL. That nothing is impossible to God, in Whom we live and move and have our being. Wherefore, most gracious Festus, prove all things and hold fast that which is good!

[*As* FESTUS *converses with those around him, an* ATTENDANT *enters, Left, and halts before the tribunal.*]

ATTENDANT. Herod Agrippa, King of the Jews, approaches.

FESTUS. Bid King Herod welcome! [ATTENDANT *retires Left;* FESTUS *turns to* ANANIAS.] End this rambling affair quickly, now! What is your case against him you accuse?

ANANIAS. First, that he is a public pest, an agitator who lives by exciting factions among the Jews everywhere; second, that he is a ring-leader of the blaspheming Nazarenes, who harbor no good intentions; and third, that he abjures our Holy Law and profanes the Temple—which latter charge great Caesar himself has recognized as a capital crime.

FESTUS. And what would you have me do?

ANANIAS. Remand the felon to Jerusalem, most worthy Governor, there to stand trial before the Sanhedrin, according to our Law which he has infringed.

FESTUS. [*After some deliberation.*] Of all this, I make nothing more than a local quarrel among you Jews. When a legion captain in your Temple City, some twenty years ago, this same man Paul, if I remember rightly, was your Sanhedrin's chiefest prosecutor.

EZRA. Aye, but he turned traitor to his sacred vow.

FESTUS. As I recall it now, on one occasion, we journeyed toward Damascus together, did we not, Paul?

PAUL. Verily, Governor, on the greatest day in all my life —that same day The Christ appeared to me in His transfigured glory and set my erring feet upon the One True Path, which earnestly I have tried to follow ever since.

EZRA. [*Breaking in.*] You renegade, liar—ugh!

FESTUS. [*Addressing* ANANIAS.] His having disagreed with you men of the Temple, I cannot see where it is any of Rome's business to intervene. The whole matter has been dragged out too long already. To make an end—[*Addressing* PAUL.]—do as they ask, under my protection!

PAUL. Against the Law of the Jews, noble Festus, have I offended no more than against the laws of Rome.

ANANIAS. He dodges the issue.

FESTUS. Answer me this, Paul: will you go to Jerusalem for trial?

PAUL. I stand at the judgment seat of Caesar. Here should I be judged, and not by the Sanhedrin. Even you, Governor, who have just admitted knowing me of old, know that I have never wronged the Jews. If I am an offender and have committed any capital crime, it is not against them—but against the Empire. Should Rome find me guilty, I am not afraid to die.

EZRA. [*Snarling at* PAUL.] You braggart!

PAUL. But if all the accusations made by these men—[*Indicating the Jews.*]—are nil, no one can sacrifice me to them as a favor.

FESTUS. [*Nettled by this last.*] You realize to whom you are speaking?

ANANIAS. The insolent—

PAUL. [*Breaking in.*] I do. Wherefore, oh Festus, I appeal unto Caesar. [*This bold declaration falls like a bombshell.*]

FESTUS. You—appeal to Caesar? By what right?

PAUL. [*Drawing himself up proudly.*] By the right of every free-born Roman citizen—unjustly charged.

ANANIAS. A subterfuge, noble Festus! He seeks but to delay judgment. Conscious of his guilt, the vagabond dares not face those whom he has betrayed.

FESTUS. Though we like not to be questioned in matters of justice, yet this ends all our responsibility in the case; wherefore it should be a most welcome solution. Since to Caesar you have appealed, Paul—to Caesar you shall go.

PAUL. God be magnified! At last, I am to see Rome.

ANANIAS. [*Gnashing his teeth at* PAUL.] May the waters of affliction deluge you, on the way!

[*In response to a gong, which* FESTUS *has sounded,* THAMYRIS *enters, Right. Having aged considerably, he is scarcely recognizable.*]

FESTUS. [*Calling to* THAMYRIS.] Into your keeping, Julio, I give this man. [*Indicating* PAUL.]

THAMYRIS. [*Recognizing* PAUL, *but not being recognized.*] Him—governor? [*Struggles with conflicting emotions.*]

FESTUS. As you value your life, deliver him safely in Rome, unto Caesar, the first opportunity that offers.

[*Trumpet sounds, off stage, followed by shouts.*]

VOICES. [*Off stage.*] Hail, Herod Agrippa, the King!

FESTUS. [*Arising.*] I go to meet the King. [*Disappears, off Left, followed by his retinue.*]

ANANIAS. [*Hissing at* PAUL.] Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. Think not to escape; for I too will go to Rome. Remember, it is written: "Dogged shall be the traitor's heels as the hunted stag."

EZRA. By the sacred Torah and Talmud, beware of our undying hatred!

PAUL. [*Very gently.*] Hate stirreth up strife, my brothers; but love correcteth all sins.

[*Showing their teeth and uttering a contemptuous* "Bah," ANANIAS *and* EZRA *depart, back Right.*]

THAMYRIS. [*To Paul.*] So, you've been entrusted to me, for safekeeping. The gods are surely just. To him who waits, all things come—even his chance for revenge.

PAUL. [*Mystified.*] Why, stranger, what reason have you for desiring revenge against me?

THAMYRIS. You don't recognize me? [PAUL *shakes his head.*] Well, I know you.

PAUL. We have met before?

THAMYRIS. Where is Thekla?

PAUL. [*With look of astonishment.*] Why do you ask me that?

THAMYRIS. Because you robbed me of her.

PAUL. I—robbed you—of Thekla?

THAMYRIS. [*Bitterly.*] I am Thamyris, who was her betrothed.

PAUL. [*Coming close, searches his face.*] You—Thamyris?

THAMYRIS. The same. I had you whipped out of Iconium, when your accursed teaching bewitched my love. She fled after you. The last time I saw her was in Antioch, as she was about to be sacrificed to Jupiter. That she escaped, I heard later. But since then, never a word. That was nearly ten years ago. What has become of her?

PAUL. The good woman keeps a holy shrine, near Seleucia, dedicated to the one true God.

THAMYRIS. [*Sneeringly.*] Good woman—and followed you?

PAUL. Never was there woman more pure or holy, Thamyris. Me she sought only for instruction concerning God.

THAMYRIS. A likely story!

PAUL. But tell me, why are you called Julio, here?

THAMYRIS. Because that is now my name. To forget the loss of Thekla, I became a Roman and joined Caesar's cohorts, as the surest way to be revenged on you, should our paths

ever cross—as this day they have. Hence, I gladly accept the charge to deliver you to Nero; for he knows best how to deal with you Christians. Come!

PAUL. [*Following* THAMYRIS, *Right.*] Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits.

[*As* PAUL *and* THAMYRIS *depart, off Right,* FESTUS *and* AGRIPPA *enter, Left. The later is a Jew of fine physique and pleasing personality, in kingly trappings. Retinue of* FESTUS *and* AGRIPPA'S *entourage follow.*]

AGRIPPA. We always visit Caesarea, Festus, to pay our respects to each new Roman Governor.

FESTUS. I esteem the honor.

AGRIPPA. Of course, you must not expect to find it lively here, as in the Imperial City.

FESTUS. Yet is there ample to keep one occupied. Only this morning, I disposed of a vexatious case, concerning which your people of Jerusalem have been at me, ever since my arrival.

AGRIPPA. And what was that?

FESTUS. It had to do with a prisoner called Paul, one I inherited from my predecessor, Felix.

AGRIPPA. I have heard of Paul.

FESTUS. He seems to be the victim of a violent fanaticism. Mere mention of his name drives the Jews into a fury. The whole controversy turns on a certain Jesus, whom they claim to have killed—yet Paul alleges Him to be alive.

AGRIPPA. [*Laughing.*] Quite right, worthy Festus! I have some knowledge of these affairs. What disposition made you of the case?

FESTUS. I sent it to Rome, as the prisoner exercised his right of appeal to Caesar, refusing to be tried by the Sanhedrin.

AGRIPPA. I hardly blame him for not returning to Jerusalem. Had he gone, he would never have escaped.

FESTUS. And from what I know of Nero, his chances in Rome are not much better. [*Both laugh as if it is a good joke.*]

AGRIPPA. A strange fellow, this man Paul. I have often wished to hear him for myself.

FESTUS. A wish easily gratified, noble Agrippa. Would you see him, now? [AGRIPPA *nods;* FESTUS *signals to an attendant.*] Bring in the prisoner Paul!

[*Attendant departs, back Right.* FESTUS *leads* AGRIPPA *to a seat on the tribunal.*]

AGRIPPA. [*As they both sit.*] This new teaching which Paul utters, we Herods have seen start from nothing and grow to amazing proportions, in less than half a century. But you know all about that, Festus, since you were here in Judea, during the uproarious times which attended the Galilean's crucifixion.

FESTUS. To tell the truth, I never took much interest in the matter; and the little that I did know about it has mostly been forgotten, in the twenty years I have been away, in other parts of the empire.

AGRIPPA. Well, it was in the reign of our honored great grandfather that the birth of a babe was announced, which some declared should become the King of the Jews. To remove the prospective usurper, that early Herod ordered the slaughter of all male infants. Countless innocents were sacrificed, but the wanted-one escaped. Then Antipas, my great uncle, yielded to a dancing girl the head of one called John the Baptist, a forerunner of the sect. James the Elder was put to death for treason, by my father. But in spite of all the blood shed by our family, the Nazarenes have continued to multiply steadily.

FESTUS. I have never been able to understand why there is so much bitterness against them.

AGRIPPA. Chiefly because of the large numbers they are winning over from Israel. Yet, why any Jew should want to desert the Law, the Prophets and the Temple, for what they have to offer, is beyond me.

[*Doors, Right, open;* PAUL *enters shackled to an Attendant.*]

PAUL. [*Advancing to the tribunal.*] You sent for me, Governor?

FESTUS. [*Nodding.*] Since you have appealed to Caesar, Paul, it is necessary to send along a summary of the charges. Being perplexed as just what to say, I am glad of this opportunity to have you appear once more—particularly that King Agrippa here, who is interested in the controversy, may hear you.

AGRIPPA. [*As* PAUL *hesitates.*] Proceed, Paul! You have my permission to speak freely for yourself.

PAUL. [*Bowing respectfully.*] Most happy am I, King Agrippa, for this chance to defend myself before you, touching the things whereof the Jews have accused me; because I know you to be expert in all their customs and questions.

AGRIPPA. 'Tis well.

PAUL. My life, from its earliest days in Jerusalem, is known to all Jews. It was that of a Pharisee, the strictest breed of Israel. And now I am impeached, for my hope in the fulfillment of the promises made by God to our forefathers. But why is it deemed with all of you a thing past belief—if God raises the dead to life?

[PAUL *pauses for a reply.* AGRIPPA *shakes his head.*]

FESTUS. Because once you're dead—you're dead!

PAUL. [*Unmindful of the snicker greeting* FESTUS' *remark.*] With the details of my conversion, I will not burden you. Suffice to say, oh Herod Agrippa, that from a bigotted Sanhedrist, I came naturally into the conviction that the long desired Messianic hope of our nation had been actually realized in that Jesus of Nazareth, whose followers I so brutally persecuted, but Who won me by a personal revelation of His Glory to the knowledge that He had risen from the dead. Incredible as it may seem, The Christ stood before me, four years after Calvary, on the road to Damascus.

AGRIPPA. [*Eagerly.*] You really saw Him?

PAUL. With the eyes of my soul, far more distinctly than I could ever have seen Him with these eyes of the flesh. How then could I resist the witness of such a noonday vision? How could I disobey the heavenly voice that sent me forth to open the eyes of Jew and Gentile alike, that they might turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that by faith in Jesus they might receive remission of sins and a lot among the sanctified? I was not disobedient to it, King Agrippa, but showed first unto them of Damascus, Jerusalem and throughout all the coasts of Judea and then to the Gentiles across the Aegean Sea, beseeching them all to repent and to live lives consistent with such repentance.

FESTUS. [*Addressing* AGRIPPA.] Surely, a weird and fanciful superstition.

PAUL. It was on this account the Jews seized me in the Temple lately and tried to kill me. However, having obtained help which is from God, I have stood firm until now, solemnly exhorting rich and poor alike, saying nothing except what the Prophets and Moses predicted as soon to happen and proclaiming the message of ineffable light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

AGRIPPA. That, Paul, is where you erred.

PAUL. No, honored King Agrippa! For as there is but one God and one Father, who is above all and in us all, so there can be but one people. Hence are we all equal sharers in one great universal brotherhood, which must ultimately be established on earth, as it is in Heaven.

FESTUS. [*Scoffingly.*] You are beside yourself, Paul. Too much study is making you mad.

PAUL. [*With self control.*] I am not mad, worthy Festus. I speak words of sanest Truth. The King here knows about these matters; for all that I say has been done in the open.

FESTUS. Most likely.

PAUL. [*As* AGRIPPA *hestitates to commit himself.*] You believe in the Prophets of Israel, Herod Agrippa? I know you do.

AGRIPPA. [*Smiling warily.*] Are you trying to persuade me to become a Christian?

PAUL. [*Uplifting his manacled hands.*] Would to God that not only you, oh King, but all who hear me might this day become such as I am—except for these chains.

AGRIPPA. [*Waving* PAUL *off.*] Hardly that! [*Arising, as if tired of the discussion.*]

FESTUS. [*Also arising; to* AGRIPPA.] This fellow may be a misguided enthusiast or an uninspired fanatic, but I cannot see that he is a criminal.

AGRIPPA. Had he not appealed to Caesar, you might readily have discharged him, Governor.

FESTUS. [*To* PAUL.] Now you see what your impetuosity has brought on you.

PAUL. God wills that I should go to Rome, Your Execllency, and under Roman escort. There is work for me.

[THAMYRIS *enters, Right; crosses to the tribunal.*]

THAMYRIS. The ship Lydia is about to depart for the Imperial City, most worthy Governor; and I am ready to take this man. [*Indicating* PAUL.]

FESTUS. He is in your custody.

AGRIPPA. Farewell, Paul! [*As* THAMYRIS *leads him, Right.*]

FESTUS. And good luck to you—with Nero!

PAUL. [*Turning on the threshold.*] What you godless Romans call "good luck," piously we term—the favor of the Lord. His blessings on all of you!

[*As* THAMYRIS *and* PAUL, *with the Attendant, depart, off Right,* AGRIPPA *and* FESTUS *leave, Left, followed by their respective retainers, laughing and chatting gaily.*]

END OF SCENE NINE

CURTAIN

THE WISEMAN. [*Before the curtain.*]

Fifteen years have come and gone,
Since last we met the Lady Thekla,
On that great day, when Paul took ship
To bear The Word across to Europe.
You will recall, she would go too;
But he refused. Now see we her again
Consecrated to the Holy Work,
In a mountain shrine established
For the worship of the One True God.

Later on, we shall join Paul in Rome,
The chief objective of his latter life.
Not being found in bonds for crime,
He was acquitted at the bar of Nero.
Then, as was promised, in the Tiber City,
Paul bore bold witness to The Christ;
And everywhere His Word increased,
Even into Caesar's own household.
Once more he was arrested,
When all deserted him, save Luke.
Paul knew this was the end.

Demeaned like any ordinary felon,
God's great ambassador is chained
In the Mamertine's dank dungeon.
Yet, loyal to the last, Paul never wavers.
In Judea persecuted, mobbed in Greece,
Rome murders him; and once again,
The martyr's blood is the seed of the church.

For such a life there is no death,
Its transition but a step upward and on.
Paul learned to overcome, like his dear Master,
The chiefest lesson we all have to learn.
Now see the Apostolic Age ring down—
Of all Christian centuries the most commanding!

SCENE TEN

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

BASIL, JABEZ } *men of Seleucia.*
EZRA.
THEKLA.
CYRUS.

Holy women and maidens.

SCENE: *A cave in the Calamon Mountains, near Seleucia, in Syria. It is an irregularly shaped, rocky opening, running back apparently for an indefinite distance; dimly lighted from above, as a little sunlight forces its way through a fissure. A smoking torch burns in a recess, Left, projecting weirdly dancing shadows. Here and there, hang glistening stalactites. Entrance is gained from the outside, through an inlet, Right, concealed by an ox-hide.*

THEKLA *has taken refuge in this secluded place; and it serves as the retreat of a holy sisterhood, for the founding of which she was the first woman sainted by the early Christian Church. Fifteen years having passed since she was seen on the Aegean shores,* THEKLA *is matronly now, though still preserving much of her youthful charm.*

The curtain's rise discloses BASIL *and* JABEZ, *evil-looking fellows, entering the cave stealthily, through the opening, Right.* EZRA *follows.*

It is seven years after the last episode.

EZRA. So this is where she hides.

BASIL. A likely hole for witchery.

EZRA. What know you of the woman?

JABEZ. Not much.

BASIL. She's called Thekla. Reports of her miraculous cures have spread, far and wide.

JABEZ. It is said the sick are made well, no matter what their distempers, on reaching this cave's entrance, so potent is her influence.

EZRA. [*Snorting incredulously.*] Huh!

BASIL. Yes, and as a result, there is no longer any profitable practice for us leeches in Seleucia.

JABEZ. Not only that! But them she heals go forth glorifying some new God, from whom the hag pretends to derive her power. Our ancient deities are being neglected.

EZRA. What do you propose doing?

JABEZ. Break her charm.

EZRA. How?

BASIL. By defiling her.

EZRA. What good would that do?

JABEZ. We have heard she is a priestess of Virtue—that whatever she requests is granted because of her chastity. If we can only despoil that, she will no longer be able to restore the sick.

BASIL. And then we will get our patients back.

EZRA. You are mistaken, my friends. This Thekla is a wicked sorceress, who has obtained her powers from an evil fellow named Paul, whose paramour she was.

JABEZ. Then is she not a virgin?

EZRA. Quite the contrary. She is a woman of very ill repute, who has hid herself in this secluded corner, because she had to flee every place else. You can only destroy her influence by destroying her.

BASIL. You mean—kill her?

EZRA. [*Cunningly.*] I am an earnest Jew, men of Seleucia, whose whole life has been dedicated to upholding God, the God of Israel, whom her vile lover seeks to overthrow. If you would guard your women from contamination, I say—stamp out this profligate Thekla as you would a plague!

[*Clear, sweet, feminine voices heard singing "The Ninety-first Psalm," off stage back. It grows stronger as they approach.*]

JABEZ. [*As they hear the singing.*] Sh-h-h—away!

[EZRA, BASIL *and* JABEZ *disappear, through the opening, Right. As they do, out of the darkness, back, comes a band of young women in flowing white robes.* THEKLA *follows, with* CYRUS.]

THEKLA. [*As the singing ceases.*] Be Thou my strong habitation, whereunto I continually resort; for Thou art my rock and my fortress.

THE WOMEN. [*Intoning.*] Let God be magnified!

THEKLA. Thou knowest my foolishness, oh God; and my sins are not hid from Thee.

THE WOMEN. Hosannah to the Son of David.

CYRUS. You are not foolish, dutiful Thekla—neither a sinner.

THEKLA. Would I were sure of it.

CYRUS. Why not?

THEKLA. Because, though I have fled to this retreat, my thoughts are always straying afar—out into the world.

CYRUS. But God having put us into the world, He must have meant for us to live in it. Look at Brother Paul! He is ever in the thick of it.

THEKLA. [*Repressing deep emotion.*] Aye, but Paul is a traveler in our beloved Lord's business. You say he is in Rome once more?

CYRUS. [*Nodding.*] On appeal to Caesar. Had he remained among the Jews, they surely would have killed him; for he has become a stranger to them.

TKEKLA. You think him more safe in Rome?

CYRUS. Nero freed him before. Hence, Paul confidently expects an early release, this time. I delivered your message in Jerusalem, when he was sorely beset by enemies. He promised to come to Seleucia, ere long.

THEKLA. Master Paul will never see his native land again.

CYRUS. [*Startling at this prophecy.*] You think not?

THEKLA. If he would see me, as you say, Cyrus, then I must journey to Rome.

CYRUS. That wicked city is no place for unprotected women.

THEKLA. God's women are protected everywhere, Cyrus. And if Rome be so wicked, then must our sisters there have great need of the precious message I shall bring them. When do you leave?

CYRUS. In the morning.

THEKLA. I shall go along, with some of these, my faithful ones. [*Indicating maidens in the background.*]

THE WOMEN. To Rome, Mother Thekla? [*All are eager with anticipation.*]

CYRUS. But truly, I'd rather not—

THEKLA. I am determined. God has directed me.

CYRUS. As you say, then. I had better arrange with the ship's captain, at once. [*Turns back.*]

THEKLA. Think you Brother Paul will be glad to see me again, Cyrus?

CYRUS. He is always glad to see the Lord's beloved. [*Disappears, off back.*]

THEKLA. [*To the women.*] Make a joyful noise unto God, all of you! Angelica, Daphne, Martha and Saphronia—the four of you shall accompany me, to Rome.

[*Their rejoicing is interrupted by an ominous knocking on the ox-hide. Without waiting,* BASIL *enters rudely, followed by* JABEZ *and* EZRA.]

THE WOMEN. [*Evincing alarm.*] Oh-h-h-h!

THEKLA. [*Calmly polite.*] Your business, gentle men?

BASIL. Is one named Thekla here?

THEKLA. What would you of her?

JABEZ. [*Swaggering impudently.*] We have a mind to force her favor.

[*As* BASIL *and* JABEZ *approach* THEKLA, *the other Women huddle farther into the background, with little shrieks of fear.* EZRA *remains near the entrance.*]

THEKLA. [*Without wavering.*] Why that?

BASIL. Because she has stolen our patients.

THEKLA. I am Thekla.

EZRA. [*Sneeringly.*] Paul's wench!

THEKLA. No, not that. Only a mean old woman.

EZRA. [*To the other men.*] There, you hear? She admits what I said.

THEKLA. Yet am I the servant of our Lord Jesus Christ.

BASIL. Who is He?

EZRA. An impious scamp and reprobate, the inciter of sedition and patron of bawds such as she. [*Indicating* THEKLA.]

THEKLA. [*Prayerfully.*] Peace, be still and know that I am God.

JABEZ. Enough—come! [*He starts toward* THEKLA, *followed by* BASIL. *Both stop involuntarily, as she raises her hand.*]

THEKLA. Although you men have a vile design, yet shall you not accomplish it.

JABEZ. We'll see.

[*The two men lunge viciously at* THEKLA *but stop short of her. Shrieking frantically, the Women disappear into the darkness, off back.*]

THEKLA. [*With perfect calm.*] Have patience, oh men, and see the glory of your Maker!

EZRA. [*Approaching* THEKLA.] You foul-mouthed blasphemer!

[JABEZ *and* BASIL *make another attempt to seize* THEKLA; *but they are unable to get near her.*]

THEKLA. [*Her arms folded over her bosom.*] Lord God of Hosts, to whom none can be likened; who makest Thyself triumphant over Thine enemies; who didst deliver me from the fire, and who didst not give me up to Thamyris, nor to Alexander; who didst preserve me in the deep waters; who hast everywhere been my helper, and hast glorified my name in Thee: now, also deliver me from the hands of these wicked men, nor suffer them to debauch me; for I love Thee and long only for Thee, oh Father, Son and Holy Christ, forevermore.

JABEZ. Jump on her!

BASIL. Knock her down!

[*Speaking together, the two make one more mad effort to attack* THEKLA *but are mysteriously repelled.*]

EZRA. Kill her! [*Drawing a dagger, he rushes fiercely at* THEKLA, *only to be repulsed like the others.*]

[THEKLA, *never lowering her eyes, continues calmly in silent prayer.*]

BASIL. The miserable witch!

[*Completely mystified, the men look on* THEKLA *with open-mouthed amazement. It gets darker gradually.*]

VOICE FROM HEAVEN. Fear not, Thekla, my faithful servant! I am ever with thee. See—the place which is opened! Thereby shalt thou escape!

[*The rocky wall, Left, separates just wide enough for her to enter it.*]

THEKLA. [*Stepping into opening.*] Oh, that men would praise the Lord, for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men!

[JABEZ, BASIL *and* EZRA *are dumbfounded for the moment. On recovering, they dash toward the opening and try to seize* THEKLA; *but all they can catch is the end of her veil, as she disappears.*]

EZRA. Let not the wanton get away! [*Plunging after* THEKLA, *he is trapped and crushed by the closing walls; screams in great agony.*]

BASIL. See what the gods have done! [*Pointing to* EZRA'S *now limp body.*]

JABEZ. [*As it grows darker.*] Come away, lest they smite us too, in this accursed trap.

[JABEZ *and* BASIL *flee in terror, off Right. Swelling notes of an anthem sung by Women, off stage back, heard as the curtain descends slowly, in total darkness.*]

END OF SCENE TEN

CURTAIN

[*Note*: *The change to the next and last scene should be a quick one.*]

SCENE ELEVEN

The Characters [*as they appear*]:

PAUL.
LUKE.
PROCESSUS, MARTINIUS } *stewards of Nero.*
THAMYRIS.
STRABUS, *a jailer.*
THEKLA.
NERO, *the Emperor of Rome.*
TWO PRISONERS.

Guards, Soldiers, Prisoners.

SCENE: *A dark, smelly dungeon in the Mamertine Prison, at Rome, of which Hawthorne wrote:"Methinks there cannot be on earth another so evil a den, so full of haunting memories and vague surmises." Faint streaks of daylight seep through a grated window high up, Left. Back Right is a heavily barred door, opening into the cell. Yelling, cursing prisoners and clanking chains, off stage, are heard during the progress of the scene.*

DISCOVERED: *As the lights come up,* PAUL, *writing at a rude table, Left; being shackled, it is laborious work.* LUKE *stands nearby. Now in his* 65*th year,* PAUL *looks old, for the life of extreme hardship he has led; but his mind and spirit are young as ever; and he seems not the least depressed by his environment.*

One year has passed, since the last episode.

PAUL. [*Smiling as he writes.*] When I was a child, Brother Luke, I spake as a child; I understood as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things.

LUKE. Tell me, Master Paul: will I ever be able to do any of the wonderful things our dear Lord did?

PAUL. Surely! For did not Jesus promise—"He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do?"

LUKE. I do believe.

PAUL. [*Arising, embraces* LUKE.] Then there is before you a life of unlimited possibilities. Only remain steadfast to the first of the eternal commandments, which is also the greatest—"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

LUKE. Aye, master.

PAUL. And remember that we cannot serve both God and mammon, for the flesh lusteth against the spirit. [*Resumes seat at table.*] Now, leave me, my brother, that I may finish this letter to beloved Timothy. But be sure and return a little later, and bring me news how those of The Way here in Rome are faring. Fail not to bind on them ever to be perfect, even as our Heavenly Father is perfect.

LUKE. As you command, dear Master Paul. [*Departs, back Right.*]

PAUL. [*Repeating as he writes.*] And so, Timothy, my beloved son, I charge you in the sight of God, and of Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead: preach the Word; be zealous in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with the utmost patience as a teacher. Be sober in all things, suffering hardship, and discharge fully your duties as a minister of God. As for me, already I am being offered up; and the time of my translation is now close at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have run the race; I have kept the faith. Hence, make an effort to come to me speedily, gentle Timothy; for all have abandoned me, save Luke. Oh, may it not be laid to their account! Bring Mark along, for he is useful in ministering to me. And when you come, fetch the cloak I left in Troas, Timothy, and the books, especially the parchments.

[*As* PAUL *pauses to think what else to write,* PROCESSUS *and* MARTINIUS *enter, with drawn swords.*]

PROCESSUS. Are you ready?

PAUL. What for?

PROCESSUS. To die!

MARTINIUS. We have Nero's order to deliver you to the headsman.

PAUL. So soon?

PROCESSUS. [*Brusquely.*] Our prisons are all full to overflowing—of Christians. We must begin cleaning them out.

PAUL. [*In a far-away manner.*] I suppose so.

MARTINIUS. One of your fellows, called Peter, is about to be crucified.

PAUL. Blessed be Simon Peter!

MARTINIUS. They say he glories in that disgraceful death.

PAUL. Truly—for did not Christ Jesus, Whom we follow, achieve His mortal end that way? To emulate Him in any detail is a priceless privilege; wherefore, in dying on the cross, Peter has good reason for glorying.

PROCESSUS. [*Shaking his head.*] You Christians are a hard lot to understand. Apparently strong, normal men, you suffer all sorts of indignities and never even strike back, as if you were abjectly weak. Why?

PAUL. Because of our love of God.

MARTINIUS. What do you expect to gain thereby?

PAUL. The victory of defeat.

PROCESSUS. Victory of defeat? None ever heard a beaten Roman claiming the battle as his.

PAUL. Because the weapons of your warfare are carnal. You fight solely for material ends; while our goal is spiritual.

MARTINIUS. And so you're not afraid to meet the executioner?

PAUL. Quite the contrary. I shall rejoice to keep the appointment; for he will prepare me to don the spotless robes of immortality.

PROCESSUS. [*As if suddenly impressed.*] Tell me: can this God of yours give everyone such peace?

PAUL. Aye, my friend—the peace that passes all understanding.

PROCESSUS. [*Addressing* MARTINIUS.] What do you make of it?

MARTINIUS. I wish I had his assurance; for sooner or later, we all have to face death. [*Addressing* PAUL.] What proof can you give that what you say is true?

PAUL. [*Arising, approaches the men, Center.*] After my demise, go to the grave where my body shall be left. There you will find two men standing in prayer—Luke and Titus—who will give you the token of salvation.

PROCESSUS. [*To* MARTINIUS.] I cannot deliver this man to his doom. [*Indicating* PAUL.]

MARTINIUS. Beware of Nero then!

PROCESSUS. I care not; for I believe in his God.

MARTINIUS. You?

PAUL. [*With eyes uplifted.*] Surely, the Lord has come.

PROCESSUS. [*Kneeling at* PAUL'S *feet.*] Only tell me: what must I do to be saved?

PAUL. Study well the Holy Book of Life; acquaint thyself with Him and be at peace! [*Assists* PROCESSUS *to his feet.*]

MARTINIUS. [*Showing alarm.*] This place is infected. Come —come away! [*Leads* PROCESSUS *out of the cell, back Right.*]

PAUL. [*Breathing a sigh of satisfaction, returns to the table and resumes writing.*] And in conclusion, faithful Timothy, know that the Lord has always stood by me and filled me with inward strength, that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear it. I know the Lord will deliver me from every attack and will keep me safe, in preparation for His Heavenly Kingdom. Wherefore, to Him be all glory—until the Ages of the Ages!

[THAMYRIS *enters, as* PAUL *ends his letter.*]

THAMYRIS. Still here, I see.

PAUL. Welcome, my friend!

THAMYRIS. I'm told you have been sentenced, at last. Six long years since I first brought you to Rome, from Caesarea.

PAUL. And a most eventful period.

THAMYRIS. What form of death?

PAUL. Being a Roman citizen—decapitation.

THAMYRIS. When?

PAUL. The hour, I know not—but soon. Just now, two stewards came from Nero to deliver me to the block; but they departed.

THAMYRIS. You converted them? [PAUL *nods.*] Fiend!

PAUL. God entered the heart of one of them.

THAMYRIS. [*Balancing on the table-edge.*] You seem to have a strange influence, Paul, over all that are thrown with you. Even now, myself who have every reason to hate you bitterly—cannot but feel sorry.

PAUL. That, Thamyris, is the God in you.

THAMYRIS. Why do you endure hardships and humiliation so meekly?

PAUL. To humble the flesh and thereby become worthy of inheriting life eternal.

THAMYRIS. Since coming to Rome, I suppose I have heard you say that a thousand times; yet am I unable to fathom your meaning. I can comprehend no state save this one, here and now, nor other advantages but those apparent to my senses.

PAUL. That which you call "here and now," my friend, is only temporal, unreal. The Spirit alone is everlasting—real.

THAMYRIS. This Spirit you talk so much about, I know not. About me and to myself, only my body is real.

PAUL. Your body, Thamyris, is merely a bad dream—as transient as the phantoms of your nightly sleep—from which one day you will awaken into life unceasing. Concerning these issues, you are as one color-blinded, to whom red is green; in other words: the unreal seems real. Yet only sempiternal Truth can be enduring.

THAMYRIS. [*Scoffingly.*] You believe all that?

PAUL. [*Arising, comes to where* THAMYRIS *sits.*] As surely as I know that two and two make four.

THAMYRIS. I cannot follow you.

PAUL. Once I was worldly proud like you, Thamyris. Yes, even prouder and far more arrogant. Then, one blessed day, on the Damascan Road, the loving Christ appeared to me and I became His willing slave. In carrying out the mission He imposed on me, I have received five scourgings with Jewish thongs, three beatings with Roman rods, and been stoned once. I was shipwrecked three times and spent a day and a night, floating in the open sea. Seven times have I been im-

prisoned and as often brought to trial, to say nothing of the numerous perils faced while traveling in His service, from robbers, spies and my own countrymen, as well as from the Gentiles; the dangers of crossing rivers, seas and deserts; with many sleepless nights, in hunger and in thirst, in frequent fastings, in extremes of heat and cold, and with often insufficient clothing.

THAMYRIS. [*Slipping from the table to his feet.*] All these things you have endured for your God?

PAUL. Aye, and would gladly endure a thousand more! The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. Nothing man can do to this old body matters; for in a little while I shall cast it off for the brighter vestments of Eternity—yonder! [*Pointing up.*]

THAMYRIS. Will Thekla be there?

PAUL. All God's children go to His celestial abode.

THAMYRIS. I don't know why; but I begin to feel as if I too might become a Christian. I'm sure I would, if only I could find Thekla and win her forgiveness.

PAUL. Already you are forgiven, since the remission of sin begins with the contrite heart.

THAMYRIS. Master Paul, how can I be redeemed?

PAUL. [*Putting his arm around him.*] By letting that Mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

THAMYRIS. [*Kneeling.*] Pray for me!

PAUL. Gladly, my son—

[STRABUS, *the jailer, appearing outside the cell, back Right, interrupts* PAUL'S *prayer. Opening door, he admits* THEKLA *whose face is covered.*]

STRABUS. [*In the doorway.*] You're the popular man, today. Since it's your last, better make the most of it.

PAUL. You are right, Strabus. [*Turning to* THEKLA, *as* STRABUS *retires.*] Welcome—

THEKLA. [*Unveiling.*] Dear Master Paul! [*Kneels before him.*]

PAUL
THAMYRIS } [*Together.*] Thekla!

THAMYRIS. [*Leaping forward.*] A miracle! I believe, Lord, I believe.

PAUL. Arise, Sister Thekla, and welcome our newest brother in Christ. [*Indicating Thamyris.*]

THEKLA. [*Arising.*] Thamyris—a Christian?

THAMYRIS. Your pardon, dearest Thekla.

THEKLA. [*Shrinking toward* PAUL.] Seek pardon of God, for all you have brought on His loyal man Paul.

PAUL. That he has already done, daughter, and is forgiven.

THEKLA. Is it true, Master, you have been condemned—to die?

[THAMYRIS *stands aside, dejected that* THEKLA *ignores him.*]

PAUL. There is no death, Thekla; for life continues ever—without beginning or ending. Remember what the Lord Jesus said: "If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death."

THEKLA. Why then this horrendous fate confronting you?

PAUL. Because I was shapen in inquity, and in sin did my poor mother conceive me.

THEKLA. Yet have you been our dear Lord's most faithful servant.

PAUL. [*With a denying head-shake.*] I am being repaid in my own coin. As I once persecuted, so have I been persecuted. God is not to be mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

THEKLA. But surely, Master, your valiant life has atoned for all that.

PAUL. Not in the flesh, Thekla! How can I ever make amends for the countless ones I harassed and helped to slay —like innocent Stephen? [*Deeply humiliated by the recollection.*]

THEKLA. [*Also winces.*] Yet is that no good reason why you should be slain by Nero.

PAUL. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. That is the inexorable law.

THEKLA. [*Brushing a tear away.*] But it isn't right.

PAUL. Question not, my daughter! "We are but of yesterday and know nothing," as Job declared, "because our earthly days are as a shadow."

VOICES. [*Off stage, Right.*] The Emperor—the Emperor! Make way for Caesar!

THAMYRIS. [*In great alarm.*] Nero approaches. [*Rushing to the door, looks out; then turns to* THEKLA.] His evil eye must never rest on you, Thekla. Come with me!

THEKLA. [*Close to* PAUL.] No, no!

PAUL. Thamyris is right.

THAMYRIS. His lust and cruelty spare no woman.

PAUL. Go, my child—go with Thamyris!

THEKLA. [*Reluctantly leaving* PAUL.] But I shall never see you again, Master Paul. [*Dropping veil to conceal her deeply aroused emotion.*]

PAUL. Yes, you will—yonder, in the New Jerusalem.

[*As* THAMYRIS *tries to hurry* THEKLA *out of the cell,* NERO *appears in the doorway, blocking the passage.*]

NERO. [*Ogling* THEKLA.] Ha! Who is the lady fair? [*Tries to peep under her veil.*]

THAMYRIS. My sister, noble Caesar.

NERO. Oh? Well, not seeming particular where she goes by day, bring her to me for a little visit—this night. [*Guffaws loudly.*]

THAMYRIS. Aye, most gracious Emperor.

THEKLA. Paul, Master Paul—

[THEKLA *collapses in the doorway.* THAMYRIS *catches her and carries her out. A moment later,* NERO *enters, leaving his soldier-guard outside. He is thirty years old; rather fantastically garbed. His face, once handsome, is now blotched from intemperance. Slender legs support his corpulent body.*]

PAUL. [*Calling after* THEKLA *and* THAMYRIS.] God keep you both!

NERO. [*Mockingly.*] Touching farewell, that—and for such an old duffer too! [PAUL *seeming oblivious of his presence, roars at him.*] Well, doesn't Caesar get a welcome, when he calls?

PAUL. [*Coming too, with a start.*] Aye, august one, to the very best I have to offer.

NERO. [*Sniffing around.*] Very best, huh! That's good. But you won't have to put up with the inconvenience here, much longer. Your butchers are sharpening their knives.

PAUL. Then I am soon to be free.

NERO. Free of your head, yes! [*Chuckles.*]

PAUL. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

NERO. [*Taking* PAUL'S *chair.*] Bah! The only liberty I know is of free and indulgent living. Eat, drink and lots of women! All the rest is nothing.

PAUL. But the Kingdom of God, oh Emperor, is not meat and drink. We should ever walk honestly, as in the day—not in drunkenness and rioting; neither in wantonness nor in clamoring.

NERO. [*Sprawling across table.*] Yet think of the fun you miss! And what good reason is there for not living riotously? We all have to die—sometime.

PAUL. The death you mean, Nero, is the wages of sin; but God offers us eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

NERO. What is all this nonsense you people talk so much about? I've listened at both your trials; and Seneca has tried to explain to me—but I fail to make anything of it, at all.

PAUL. Very well then, as God spake through Isaiah: "Come, let us reason together." [*Goes to table beside* NERO.]

NERO. Which god—whose god?

PAUL. Our great Captain of Salvation—the one and only real God that ever was, is or shall be. He made all—

NERO. [*Interrupting.*] Just a minute, Friend Paul! You might as well understand, right now, that Nero is the chief enemy of that God of yours.

PAUL. No, no, Caesar—

NERO. [*Going right on.*] In Rome none shall be worshipped but me! What's more—there is no other god.

PAUL. [*Shaking his head slowly.*] The fool hath said in his heart—there is no God.

NERO. Ha, meaning me, I suppose. No, Paul, you're the fool. [*Leaning across table, coaxingly.*] Come now, give up your folly—and worship me!

PAUL. [*Recoiling, horrified by the demand.*] Ugh—never!

NERO. I will bestow great riches and honors and shower you with special favors. What say you?

PAUL. The faith and love of Jesus Christ are worth more to me, than all the riches and honors that the world contains. As for death—being unreal, it is not to be feared.

NERO. Then you don't think I can cut you off?

PAUL. From the love of God, no! Neither death nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any creature is able to separate us from the love of God.

NERO. [*With a silly grin.*] Yes? And what good does it do you?

PAUL. All good. God's love supplies our every need.

NERO. Looks like it—from the miserable way you people get along. Why live shabbily, when you can roll in wealth? I have lots and lots of money; and I love it.

PAUL. The love of money, Caesar, is the root of all evil.

NERO. You mean you don't want money? [PAUL *shakes his head emphatically.*] That settles it. Now I know you're mad.

PAUL. Men may be insane for opinion, illustrious Nero; but not for facts.

NERO. [*Snorting.*] What do you mean—facts?

PAUL. [*With supreme earnestness.*] Facts I have seen: the sick made whole; the lame to walk and the blind to see, by mere mention of the Name of Him you Romans crucified, some thirty years ago, to appease a fanatic people. I have heard ignorant men speak all languages, seen the timid defy all fear, the impure in heart made clean, the cruel and faithless suddenly transformed into gentle and faithful followers of the One Absolute God. Had you beheld these facts, oh Caesar, could you have doubted the finger of God was there?

NERO. [*Snapping fingers belittlingly.*] Magic, sorcery, witchcraft—that's all!

PAUL. Compelled by such facts to believe that Jesus Christ was sent by God, I was compelled in a like manner to believe the doctrine He declared. Wherefore, I stand before you, most puissant Emperor of Rome, at the close of a long life of labor and of love—a Christian.

[*Mention of this term is like a barb to* NERO. *All his smouldering hatred of the sect flames up.*]

NERO. [*Hissing snake-like.*] Christian, eh? I had quite forgotten. So you glory in that foul label, as something to be proud of.

PAUL. Aye, and each year the name becomes more and more a badge of honor—and will continue to, as men learn better how to live the simple and serene Christ-life.

NERO. I suppose your skulking fellows, still at large, take great satisfaction in having set fire to our Imperial City. Well, they'll all pay the penalty, sooner or later.

PAUL. You wrong us, mighty Nero. That accusation is false.

NERO. [*Drawing his sword.*] Insolent—

PAUL. [*Never flinching.*] None who bears the Name of the gentle Christ could ever have applied the torch to beautiful Rome. Like Him Who came to fulfill, not one of us is here to destroy.

NERO. [*Flying into a rage at being contradicted.*] You're all a pack of filthy liars. If you Christians didn't burn Rome—who did?

PAUL. God knows—and maybe Nero.

NERO. [*Lunging at* PAUL, *who is unmoved.*] You dare accuse me?

PAUL. The guilty conscience needs no accuser.

NERO. [*Stepping back.*] Slanderer! Truly has it been said that everything vile and worthless drifts to Rome.

PAUL. But, Augustus—

NERO. [*Not heeding the interruption.*] I came here hoping you might confess your guilt, in which case pardon would have been granted. But since you are bull-headed, you shall die—flatulent reviler that you are.

PAUL. Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel.

NERO. We'll see.

PAUL. Not my will, oh Nero, nor even yours—but God's be done!

NERO. [*Bawling loudly as he dashes, back, Right.*] Processus—Strabus—Martinius! [*Disappears, Right, followed by the soldiers.*]

PAUL. [*Kneeling in prayer.*] Great King of Kings, if through a long life I have labored in Thy cause, in numberless perils, weariness and pain, Thine alone be the praise, the glory and the transcendence. Thou hast brought me through them all with Thy strong hand and Thy ever dependable arm. [*There is a low rumble, as of distant thunder.*] And now, oh Lord, Thou shalt soon change this poor body into the likeness of Thy wondrous Self. Be with Thy servant in this last hour! Savior and God, receive back my Spirit, that where Thou art, even I may be with Thee, forevermore.

[*The thunder has been growing louder; now there is a deafening report, the earth quakes, and the prison walls collapse.* PAUL'S *shackles fall from his wrists. Men confined in adjoining cells set up a wild howling and general tumult ensues. Released prisoners flee through openings in the falling walls.*]

PRISONER. [*As he goes.*] Save us, save us! Great Pan is dead. Who will save us?

PAUL. [*Stretching, but making no effort to escape.*] God will save you. Only believe!

ANOTHER PRISONER. Come—now's your chance to get away.

PAUL. What is the use?

STRABUS. [*Entering, is amazed to see* PAUL *standing calmly bye.*] You—not fleeing—when all others seize the opportunity to escape the wrath of Nero?

PAUL. [*As the thunder continues.*] I am no coward fearing torture, that I should run from your king. If I felt that this so-called death were an eternal death, I would do what you say. But as I don't, I shall remain and live with my King forever. Nero cannot harm God's own.

STRABUS. [*Kneeling beside* PAUL *and kissing his garment.*] Then let me share your God, too.

PAUL. [*In the attitude of blessing* STRABUS.] Gladly! Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come and drink of the waters which never stagnate.

[NERO *storms in, followed by* PROCESSUS *and* MARTINIUS. STRABUS *departs through an opening in the wall, Left.*]

NERO. [*Confronting* PAUL.] Still here, eh?

PAUL. Waiting for you, Caesar.

NERO. Good! I feared you wouldn't be. Now, you shall feel my will.

PAUL. Never have I sought to save my life; for he who does will surely lose it.

NERO. Then this is one time you are going to. [*Addressing* PROCESSUS.] Here, you—make an end of him!

PROCESSUS. Not I, Nero!

NERO. [*His rage mounting.*] Insubordinate! You then, Martinius—you kill the blackguard-monster, to teach him respect for Rome Imperial.

[*Again the thunder rolls, the earth rocks and more walls tumble. Prisoners dash through, in panic.*]

MARTINIUS. No, no, Caesar, I cannot! [*Calling to the soldiers.*] Run—run for your lives!

[*All scurry off in various directions, but* PAUL *and* NERO.]

NERO. [*Maddened by the wholesale desertions.*] None will do my bidding? The cowards! Well, by the gods, Paul, me you'll not escape.

PAUL. [*With matchless calm.*] The fullness of time is come.

NERO. Out with you—beastly Christian! [*Drives* PAUL, *at the point of his sword, back Right.*]

PAUL. [*Goes triumphantly, with head erect.*] Oh death, where is thy sting; oh grave, thy victory? For now, this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

[*As* PAUL *passes from view, ahead of the infuriated* NERO *wildly brandishing his sword, the last of the prison walls topple into a heap, and all is lighted up by the red glare of conflagration. In the next instant, a blood-curdling shriek from* NERO, *offstage, signifies that he has finally wreaked his vengeance on* PAUL. *Above the cataclysm rings "The Twenty-third Psalm," chanted by Christian prisoners as a requiem for* THE GREAT APOSTLE. *The curtain falls slowly.*]

END OF THE PLAY

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